

# PowerTalk: Strategies for Women Leaders

By Dr. Barbara Kaufman

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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 resiliency. Answer the questions posed, review the suggestions in italics 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 focus of this issue is *Navigating Around Advancement Barriers*, a skill often underutilized, despite the strong interpersonal skills of women leaders who are busy "getting the job done".

While sweat equity and doing a great job may be the keys to success in a management position, they don't guarantee advancement in leadership roles. Navigating around the barriers that keep women trapped below the glass ceiling requires a more strategic approach to career advancement.

Do you believe that hard work and excellent performance are going to get you your next promotion or pay increase? It's a myth that doesn't bear up under scrutiny. In *The American College President*, Melanie E. Corrigan writes: "From 1986 to 2001, the proportion of women presidents doubled, from less than 10 percent of all presidents to 21 percent. Despite an increase in overall number, however, women accounted for only one-fifth of all college presidents. Yet 40 percent of faculty and senior administrative staff in higher education are women." (American Council on Education, Center for Public Analysis, 2002; Chapter 3, page 15). The glass ceiling is even more firmly in place in the corporate world. A Catalyst study published in October 2005, *Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge": Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed*, shows that while women hold 50.3 percent of all management and professional positions, only 7.9 percent of Fortune 500 top earners and 1.4 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women.

According to Catalyst, senior women executives consistently point to gender-based stereotyping as the top barrier to advancement. But is that really the whole story? Could it be that women themselves are contributing to those stereotypes? For example, do you worry whether you can handle a challenging assignment or a promotion? Do you lack the self confidence to assert yourself while your male colleagues are go-getters who take the bull by the horns?

## **Navigating Around Advancement Barriers**

*Here are six take-home navigational strategies you can apply right now. If you dare to leave your comfort zone, they will take you to the next level!*

### **1. Take on a challenge!**

Identify and tackle challenging assignments that matter to the organization and position you in a more visible role to senior leadership. Demonstrate that you can get results. For example, one client of mine took on the task of "cleaning up the mess" after the resignation of a senior-level executive and several other players. She embarked on a listening campaign and responded to the needs of constituents by developing constructive policies and best practices they genuinely cared about. Eighteen months later, she received rave reviews in a satisfaction survey and soon thereafter got a well-deserved promotion and pay increase. *Take a look around you in the organization today. Where could you make a difference?*



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## **2. Take the job!**

All too often I hear clients say that they're not ready for the next promotion or uncertain that they can tackle an interim role. The truth is, no one is ever fully prepared for the next assignment or promotion. Some on-the-job learning is always necessary. *When an opportunity for advancement presents itself and it is a fit with your strengths and career goals, don't worry about your ability to cope. Just say yes!*

## **3. Take the initiative!**

Do you let your boss, mentor or network know that you're available for a new challenge? Or do you wait to be approached while your male colleagues beat you to the punch by assertively asking for new assignments? Do you "take care" while men "take charge"? It's up to you to take the initiative. *Make a list of people now whom you can contact!*

## **4. Take them up on it!**

When you're complimented on your achievements and strengths during a performance review, or someone thanks you for a job well done in a board or committee meeting, are you embarrassed by the compliment? Or do you confidently seize the moment to seek out a new assignment or lead a key initiative? *It's as simple as saying, "I love doing this kind of work. Please think of me as other projects come up."*

## **5. Take them to lunch!**

Do you seek out people in roles to which you aspire to ask them about their career path and who has been influential in their success? *Make a note now of someone who fits that profile. Then, think of specific questions you want to ask and invite the individual for lunch or coffee.*

## **6. Take advantage of help from organizations!**

Do you take full advantage of networking organizations to learn about new opportunities, such as board appointments? For example, if you're an alumna of Leadership California, you might check into "Linking Leaders," a service that helps women seek out board appointment opportunities, especially at the state level.

*Take some time now to review the websites of organizations to which you belong and learn how they can help you get ahead!*

Every other month, PowerTalk will tackle issues such as multitasking and how it can become a weakness, enhancing your ESP, the myth of balance, confusing success with happiness, adrenalin addiction, as well as other topics requested by readers.

In the June-July issue Dr. Kaufman will tackle the issue of leadership resiliency and the myth of balance.

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