

5 Key Takeaways from Successful Women in Male-Dominated Fields

By Barbara Kaufman, Ph.D.

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I was struck by the responses from a panel I moderated on Sunday evening, *“Lessons Learned on the Journey”* with three gifted women leaders in fields historically dominated by men. The topic was career trajectories and what it took to get to their positions of leadership. Our audience was the Leadership California Class of 2014, who met our speakers during Session II in San Francisco last week.

Our distinguished panel included **Marty Gilles**, Vice President of Strategy, Planning & Technology, Chevron Corporation; **Teresa Briggs**, West Region Managing Partner, Deloitte; and **Theodora R. Lee**, Esq., ('93) Shareholder, Littler Mendelson, P.C.

Here's a recap of their key points:

1. **STARTING OUT IN A CAREER, A LINER PROGRESSION HELPS YOU DEVELOP** a deep understanding of the business. However, from there, you need to be open to non-linear opportunities. This means you need to be able to take risks and recognize, as Teresa said, "If not me, who?" when you feel you are not quite ready for the opportunity presented. You have to be able to deal with ambiguity and work through defining a role. Persistence and resiliency in the face of adversity are critical success factors if you expect to be an exceptional leader.
2. **ACTIVE SPONSORSHIP IS DIFFERENT THAN MENTORING** (coaching) in that sponsors are active in seeking opportunities for you. For example, a sponsor is willing to open doors and put their "currency" and reputation on the line by suggesting you for opportunities to grow. It is wise to have more than one sponsor!
3. **BUILDING STRATEGIC NETWORKS** is a critical success factor. You need not only an operational network but a network that helps you realize our future goals. Don't wait to build a network until you need one. You want to build a network of reciprocal relationships.
4. **“LEAN IN” WHEN YOU NEED TO** take the risk of asking for an opportunity, as Teresa suggested. Lean in to get what you want. Promote yourself, e.g. by having others mention your achievements. Be willing to reinvent yourself. As Theo commented, "you are only as good as what you have done for your last client." Teresa mentioned "be your own advocate" for what you are doing that is impactful. In the face



of not receiving a couple of promotions for which she was highly qualified, Marty recalled a letter she wrote to her boss's boss to ask "What else do I need to do to be ready for the next opportunity?"

5. "LEAN OUT "AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. For example, make appointments on your calendar that will contribute to your personal resiliency in areas like regular exercise and hobbies! Theo bought land and began growing grapes as a way to add balance to her busy work life—but you don't necessarily have to buy a vineyard! Teresa mentioned asking yourself "Do I add value in this activity?" as a way of taking unrewarding or unproductive activities off of your calendar! Theo likes to ask herself the question "Do I have a passion for this?" as her filter.

Take it from these three wise women: it takes a journey to get ready for your next leadership role. Make sure you're prepared.

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