

Women Leadership Roles

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Recent history and future trends of leadership roles for women, as well as the author's guidelines for women leaders. Speech delivered to the Amarillo Women's Network in Amarillo, Texas on May 17, 1983.

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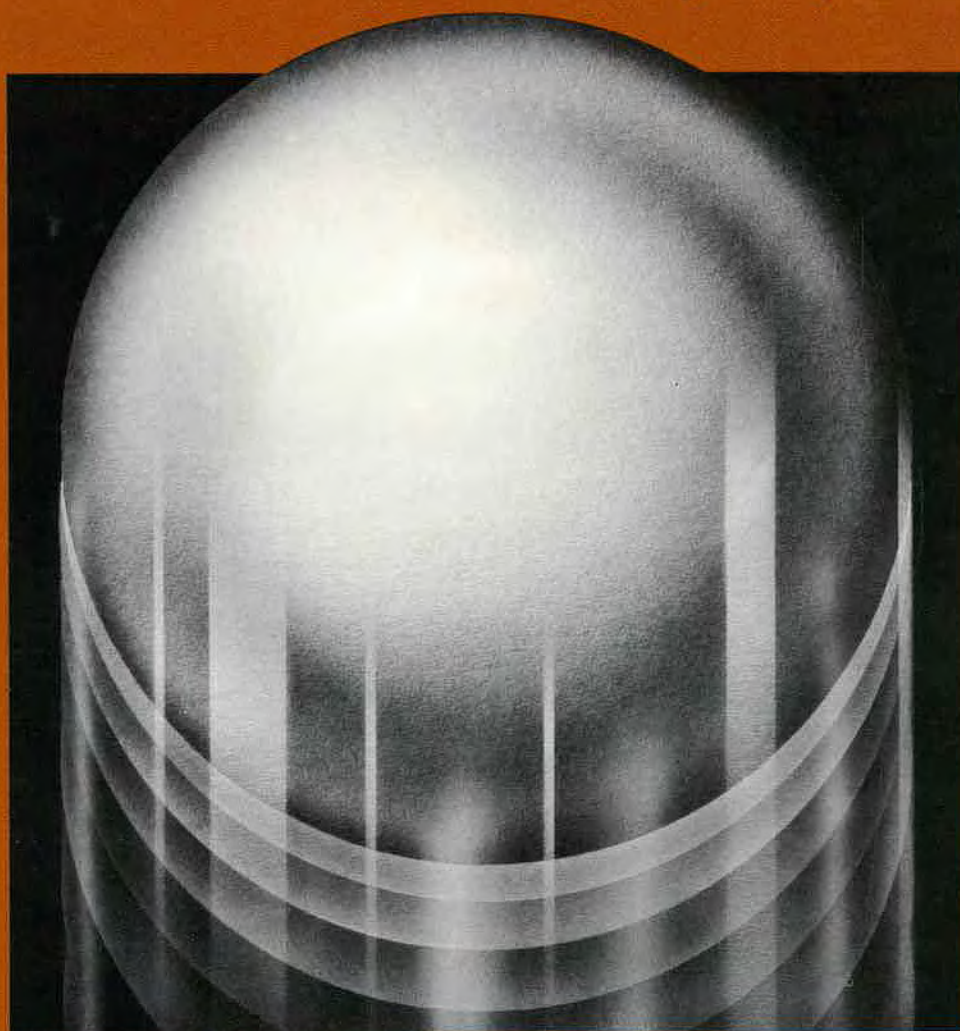


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INSIGHT SERIES

The Institute For Constructive Capitalism
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I really am pleased to be in Amarillo, Texas. Although I have lived in Texas for 17 years, this is my first visit to your city, and I have been genuinely looking forward to it. Since I consider myself a naturalized citizen of Texas, I feel that I should have all the rights and privileges of a native daughter amongst which is her enthusiasm for Texas and a curiosity to learn about and visit cities and places in the state that I have not yet seen. For that especially, I want to thank you for inviting me to Amarillo.

I have looked forward to speaking to this distinguished group about women leadership roles. In fact, I welcomed the opportunity because I have enormous confidence and tremendous faith that women leaders, as a group, will make an important contribution to bettering the world for all of us, particularly for our children and for society as a whole. You have given me a very special opportunity to share my leadership ideas with all of you.

I would like to cover a few areas that I think should be emphasized when speaking of leadership, particularly such a swiftly emerging field as women's leadership roles. First, I will touch upon some selected historical aspects beginning with emerging leadership roles for women in the 1960's.

Then I would like to share with you what I see in store for women in the future. In this context, I would like to discuss the importance for future women leaders to assume the burden of being responsible for their actions and the need for them to be held accountable for their decisions. Because they must firmly support what they think is right, women leaders must place themselves in the position of what I like to call a "deliberate victim."

Finally, I would like to share with you what I brashly claim as "Ronya's Rules for Women Leaders." These rules are neither profound nor original. They are only my own homespun rules which I have compiled from much wiser people than myself and from my own often painful personal experience. I thought that you might enjoy sharing them.

Let's begin by discussing the turbulent 1960's. The '60's was a time when many of our institutions were going through periods of great change and upheaval. The role of women in our society also began to change dramatically. The modern rule for women really emerged during this time as women surfaced as an organized group. These changes gradually began making a positive impact on our way of life.

While the role of women began to change in the '60's, changes in terms of leadership really started to form and crystalize in the 1970's. I consider the era of the '70's an

especially important period in "women time" when we (women) truly became a separate and distinct influential power group. During this most exciting decade, we began generating a positive image within our own selves that we were definitive persons in our own right.

I realize that many women in the USA were very disappointed when we lost our fight for the ERA. Think about this, though: even if the initial amendment was lost, a greater victory was won by American women. As a power group, we women developed a strong leadership identity and became highly visible. Since that time, women have been making greater and greater impacts on our country. Just look how effective the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) were in California. These women singlehandedly, quietly, and within a very short time had laws passed through the California legislature that levied severe penalties for drunk drivers. You women here today, as a viable women's network, are the indirect result of organizing the strength in women's leadership, begun by the fight for the ERA.

If the decade of the 70's brought forth such landmark firsts for women in leadership, just stop to consider what the decades of the 1980's and 1990's hold for women. This, to me, is a very sobering thought. It is one of the reasons that I welcomed the opportunity to share some of my ideas with you today on the future of women's leadership roles.

I see the '80's and '90's as providing the opening and expansion of many wonderful challenges for women. We are coming into our leadership roles with incredible advantages. One main advantage that I see for us is that we are facing our future with almost an entire page of "white space." Those of you who have careers in journalism, advertising, or public relations will know what I mean by white space. In advertising jargon, the white space is what is left on a sheet of paper that has yet to be filled with advertising or written material. Basically, what I mean by this is that women leaders will not have to overcome bad management habits or change obsolete attitudes of leadership.

We are in a position to "leap frog" ahead as leaders. We do not have to be constrained by pages of preconceived notions on how to do things. Since we are just beginning in our leadership roles, we can start filling in the "white spaces" by first skimming off the cream of the best of current leadership doctrines and then bringing in a whole new wave of positive leadership rules. Let me caution those of you here today who are already in leadership positions and those of you who are still working towards those positions, above all else, I hope that you are aware and are properly sobered by the weight of your new powers and responsibility. You must be constantly sensitive to the full responsibility and accountability of the awesome task of leadership. Therefore, it is important for all of us here today to

restructure our own thinking so that we can expedite our changing roles with efficiency and aplomb.

Our society, as well as the world, now both expects and demands that women accept their own personal responsibility towards building a more civilized world. Historically, women have, through their traditional roles as mothers, automatically assumed an obligation to civilize the world. Now, however, because of our emerging power and the changing societal expectations of women, we must undertake this obligation with a deep sense of conscious commitment.

I would like to explain what I mean by responsibility and accountability by using examples. A growing phenomenon in our country is the increasing number of women who now serve on boards of directors of corporations, banks, foundations and academic institutions. I am sure there are some of you women here today who fill this category. Happily, this is a very positive response to changing societal expectations.

The position of being a member of a board of directors of a company, bank, foundation, or any other entity, automatically places a person in a position of power in that entity. Because boards are policy making organizations, they influence the lives of many people. Policies, especially modern good ones, can and should change behavior patterns and formulate attitudes in any organization. A responsible

member of a board of directors should always set the policy of his or her organization and not delegate it. He or she should be satisfied that policy that he or she helps formulate will be of maximum benefit to the organization. The "buck" should stop with a responsible and accountable board of directors.

Today there are 367 women serving as directors of America's 1300 largest corporations. These 367 women sitting on major boards fill 527 directorships. More than 40% of the top 1300 corporations now have at least one woman on their board or directors. According to research by Korn Ferry, an international executive search firm, there has been a four-fold increase in women directors in just 10 years. Unfortunately, the 527 directorships held by women still represent only 3% of the seats on those corporate boards. As you can see, we women have a lot of room in which to grow. However, many smaller companies in our country have women sitting on their boards and many serve as presidents or are in top management positions.

What do these women bring to their organizations in their board leadership positions? Let me share with you some quotes from some of these outstanding women. Phyllis Sewell, a director of Huffy Co.: "The contribution I make is not because I'm a woman but because of my expertise." Julia Montgomery Walsh, a member of the boards of both Esmark and

Pitney-Bowes corporations: "We contribute (a special sensitivity) because of where we come from and there is no gender attached to that. We see things a little bit differently, as the women's experience in a male-oriented world."

I, particularly, identify with Jean Allard, a Chicago lawyer and a director of four major corporations. She says, "I have publicly said that women make a tremendous contribution because they are willing to ask questions without fear of losing face. When I don't know, I just ask the dumb question and often it turns out that the other directors did not know the answer either."

When I joined my first public corporate board, I felt strongly that I could not be a responsible board member unless I understood what was going on. If I didn't understand, I would keep asking questions until I did. Since I was the only woman member of the board, I could tell that my questions were an irritant to some of the men. It soon became evident that I was a particular irritant to whichever specific board member was trying to push through certain policies that he was interested in. My questions forced disclosure of certain necessary information that might not have surfaced otherwise. I felt strongly that in order for me to be an adequate and competent board member, I needed to know how the company functioned, particularly, in the financial areas.

Questioning until I understood the issues led to much more responsible decision making by the whole board. The men board members would not ask the dumb questions because they did not want to show their ignorance. Later, they would thank me privately for bringing up the questions. Not having had any history or experience on what women do as a member of a company board of directors, I was able to set my own standards. The most important criteria for me was to have a sense of fiduciary responsibility and be able to have my decisions stand the scrutiny of the stockholders. For this, I had to understand what I was doing. This involved asking questions and learning.

Today, more women are in top management and leadership positions in the areas of business, government, and academia. No doubt, some of you are here today and are probably some person's boss. Let's hope that you are all terrific "boss role models." A favorite question of seminar directors is to ask group participants to list five people whom they admired the most. Rarely is a person's boss ever listed. I hope you women here today will be able to challenge this and change this kind of negative management attitude.

As one rises in an organization, she finds herself in positions of increasing power and status. Let me caution you that power and status are pretty heady stuff. Handling them becomes crucial. As you rise in your organizations, your

management style, which includes the proper perspective on power and status, becomes your most difficult and complex task. Yet it is also the most important.

Without a clear sense of your own value system, a deep commitment to the people in your organization, and a sure sense of your own self worth and integrity as a person, power and status become negative rather than positive factors. Laura Liswood writes in the magazine The Seattle Woman: "In corporations today, I see a 'style warp;' those in power do not relate to those they're supposed to be leading." She goes on to say that in order to develop a strong management style, you must know what you want from those you lead.

I'd like to state this in my way. There are two kinds of managers in the world: those who have earned respect from the people with whom they interact and those who demand respect. It is possible for short periods of time to gain leadership from fear, seniority, or even superior technical skills. These alone will not be sustaining or enduring. To earn respect from being a better human being is the hardest and most discouraging, but also the most rewarding, goal for a manager. This is the kind of woman leader we will need for tomorrow's world.

As an example, there is a woman leader in our state government that I most admire. Ann Richards ran for and won

the position of State Treasurer of Texas. This is the first woman in fifty years who has been elected to state office in Texas. She, and her campaign manager, Jane Hickie, decided from the very beginning of her campaign that they would not conduct a campaign that resorted to ugliness and name calling. They felt that they had a unique opportunity to test whether they could win a primary political campaign on the issues and not on personality and character assassination. Even though the pressures were enormous to do so, Ann Richards and her campaign people did not back down from their principles. History has vindicated their policy. As you all know, Ann Richards is now our state treasurer.

Several weeks ago, Jane Hickie and Chula Reynolds, who was a major campaign worker for the Ann Richards' campaign, were conducting a political workshop. Let me share with you the following paraphrased dialogue between the two women.

Jane:

I've worked in political campaigns around the state and lectured around the country on campaign techniques. We have always preached that women cannot attack their male opponents. Do you recall the pressure there was to talk Ann into negative TV spots right before the election? You were the person Ann ultimately turned to for advice on that decision. You said "NO"! Why? What effect do you

think it had? Did you worry that our refusal to be negative meant that we, as women, just weren't tough enough to be successful as some charged at the time?

This was Chula's philosophical answer to those questions.

Women built the first schools, libraries and museums. They helped civilize the frontier. They have also been the traditional nurturers and healers. I see those as our most critical roles in the present and future. We live in very troubled times. The world is in great need of civilizing and healing. I am optimistic that if women aspire to and are admitted to the chambers in which the rules are made, if they rely on their female instincts, then better, more humane decisions will result from the collaboration between men and women. I don't think attacking one's opponent personally is a very civilized act, nor does it have civilizing results.

What are the qualifications for a good woman leader? And I do stress woman, because we are equal to but different from men. So, here goes "Ronya's Rules for Women Leaders."

1. Understand the concepts of power and status. Make them work for you and do not become a slave to them. They should be used as tools and must not be abused.

Using power and status in their finest sense does not mean just playing negative political games. It does mean being goal directed and working towards common goals to better your organization.

2. Have an enormous reservoir of patience. It is imperative for a woman in a leadership position, particularly if she is interacting with mostly men, not to "blow her cool." It really is possible to be firm and not lose your temper. If you want to succeed, in order to accomplish your goals, learn to wait for an appropriate opportunity to make your point without showing irritation or frustration. Let the others lose their tempers. One thing I learned was that it drives men "up a wall" when they cannot make a woman "blow her cool." The best thing you can do is "kill them with kindness," especially when they are the most upset.

3. Work very hard. Women still have to work harder to get ahead. Consider this a blessing, a positive force. The biggest advantage a woman has is her automatic, innate ability for being able to juggle three or four different jobs at the same time. Successful women are forced to be highly efficient through desperate necessity. This is a cultural hangup, and I hope that we never lose either the ability or the desire to have this talent.

4. Don't throw your weight around. The people who work for you, if you are a boss, deserve your trust, mutual respect, and open communication, and they need to be rewarded. Give credit to subordinates and appreciate their efforts. When a boss gives credit to a subordinate, it reflects positively on the boss. A secretary is vital to a boss's success. Be particularly kind and sensitive to the feelings of your secretary. A good secretary can be the vital nerve center of a smooth running organization for you. Always remember that an unwillingness to relate to secretaries or subordinates or younger men and women is a clear indication of your own insecurity.
5. Help the younger women behind you. Don't have the mistaken attitude, "I had it hard, now I'll make it hard for her." Help the young women behind you even if they surpass you. If they are competent and deserving, that makes both of you winners, and the biggest winner of all is the organization you serve and the community in which you live. A lot who are deserving will be passed up. Don't brood on it, just go on to something else. On the other hand, there will be many who will surge forward. Applaud them and boost them at every opportunity.
6. Be tenacious. Don't give up to discouragement and

regression. Women leaders are still in the small minority. Don't be angry and hostile when things are not fair. I guarantee you, they won't be fair. There is a difference between being right and winning. Sometimes you will be right and not win. The posture for women leaders is not to be discouraged by losing even though you know you are right.

7. Ignore a lot and be very flexible. Some of you probably already have, and others will have in the future, some real bums to deal with. Many times it will be necessary for you to change your focus. Your supervisors or peers may also need to change their direction. Being able to change course quickly and effectively may make the difference in your organization. In a company, being able to change quickly may well be the difference between success and failure. No matter what happens, do your best, work hard. Most of the time, it will pay off. As a leader, "nobody promised you a rose garden," so don't expect one.

8. Trust to luck. Luck plays a great part in leadership. Luck, however, is not always an intangible. Being in the right place at the right time is important. It is also imperative not only to be aware of the opportunity that is there for you but also to have the courage, conviction, ability, and most of all

endurance, to seize it and make it happen. To make the luck happen, it also takes hard work and dedication.

9. Don't take yourself too seriously. Pompous, officious women can be a real drag. Having a sense of humor is an absolute must for any leader. For a woman leader, it is imperative. Because woman leaders are still "the new kid on the block," it is important for them to make a habit of laughing. If they don't, they will cry a lot, and crying is definitely counter-productive. A sense of humor will bring out the best in the people around you.

10. Believe in and trust your woman's intuition. This is a special ability that has been honed by centuries of cultural adaption. This is a real female tool and should be used intelligently to benefit everybody in an organization. As moral and ethical issues arise in your companies, trust your instinct. Chances are your instinct will be right.

Now, you have Ronya's 10 Rules for being terrific women leaders for the world of tomorrow. Now you must build up your own criteria on top of these. Some of the rules above will not fit your leadership style. It doesn't matter.

Discard what you cannot use. Refine what you can use and add your own original and exciting new rules. Share with each other to benefit everybody, men as well as women. Whether they know it or not, men need all the help they can get.

You women here today have a rare opportunity. Since you are in role model situations, the burdens of leadership will lay heavier on your shoulders than on the women who follow you, just as the brave and dedicated women before you carried a greater burden than you have. Therefore, you must set your own set of values now and decide what you will fight for. Since there is so much "white space" left on your sheet, you do not have to erase or unlearn centuries of bad leadership roles. You are now in the vanguard of bringing about constructive changes that will bring more responsible leadership to everyone.

The strong women's network that you have built here in Amarillo is a marvelous example of what I mean. I congratulate you on your dynamic, viable organization. Other cities should look to you as a glowing example of what good woman power can be.

Another avenue is to join your professional societies and become leaders in these groups. Change will come through your influence upon and participation in your own professional organizations. Our own Texas Barbara Jordan

recently made this statement when she spoke of influencing men at a board of directors of a company on which she serves. She said, "I make suggestions that push them to the corners of the mind, raising things they have never thought about. Many of these gentlemen have never thought about thinking, competent women and sometimes they are dismayed." This is the challenge I bring you today. Let's do it so our children will enjoy better tomorrows.

In closing, I am hoping I have partially filled the "white space" in the blank sheet of women's leadership roles. Moreover, I hope that the top item to fill that space will be my parting shot - be proud that you are a woman in today's world. Being a woman is the best thing you have going for you. Because you are women, you are unique, you are special, you are beautiful. Today's world and particularly tomorrow's world are tailor-made for you. A woman leader has a distinct advantage position. Make the most of it. Don't go out of here caught up in the comfort of the slogan from the Virginia Slims cigarette ads, "You've come a long way, Baby." As a woman addressing this illustrious group here today, I can say with genuine conviction--there is no need anymore to say that "we've come a long way." Now, we can say with deserving pride, "Baby, we have arrived."