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Wise Woman's Business

Do we need to be Alpha Male?

Welcome to the first edition of 'A Wise Woman's Business'. I was recently returning from a business trip and catching up on my reading as I usually do on flights. I read an interesting article out of the March issue of *Entrepreneur*. The title of the article was 'The Alpha Advantage' with a lead off quote of : "Women need to stop waiting to be recognized and go after exactly what they want. First, women need to stop competing to get on the 'guys' team. The only team in business is now profitability. Second, women need to stop attacking each other and speaking ill of others in the workplace. Finally, women need to stop inadvertently giving up their power to alpha male clients and colleagues." This advice comes from Christopher Flett, author of *What Men Don't Tell Women About Business: Opening Up the Heavily Guarded Alpha Male Playbook*.

It seems that the US has a trend of new articles and books targeted on alpha male qualities. I had just come from the WIT Board Readiness Program's networking luncheon in Brisbane where we heard much supposition regarding why there is a lack of equitable representation of women in the board room. Cherrell Hirst, posed several questions regarding why women are poorly represented at the board level. I found it hard to believe that in today's time statements regarding women needing to take action and stop being passive still make it into print. In contrast to Christopher's opening comment that women need to go after what they want, I believe those of us who know what we want are. Small businesses employ almost half of the private sector, non-agricultural work force with 32% of these businesses lead by women. So there is no lack of female entrepreneurial skills or desire to go after what we want. Where is the disconnect at the board level with less than 10% female representation still being the norm. Could it be the lack of respect for small business?

Although I disagree with his opening statement, Christopher's first comments regarding women not trying to be 'one of the guys' rings true however. In last year's *Set up for Success Program*, Candy Tymson also supported the position that women should not behave like men. She gave several examples on how men don't want us to act like them. Besides, if we do, doesn't that defeat one of the purposes of diversity to begin with? So is the challenge then to be selective in which alpha male qualities we adopt? I propose that the challenge is how we adopt alpha male qualities. We need to adopt these qualities with care and to adapt them to our personal style, staying true to ourselves and our unique qualities. I view this alpha male fad the same as I would listen to any lecture or when I get advice from a colleague, mentor or friend. I take what I like onboard and I take note of what I definitely don't want to let slip into my behaviour, and I leave the rest behind.

On the second statement, regarding speaking ill or each other and others in the work place, I find it hard to relate to. I do not observe this type of behaviour in my work environment. It seems obvious that this should not happen. Within my personal and professional life, this is expected, except when I am venting with my significant other or seeking advise on how to deal

Personal Responsibility Corner

My personal responsibility challenge this quarter will be to work on the three little but powerful words "I am sorry". Within this newsletter I think my weakest link is apologizing too much or not when I should. My goal is to stop apologizing for anything and everything; to put meaning behind the words when I do say them; and finally, to acknowledge the reason I said them.

I am going to further challenge myself to look for an opportunity not to shirk responsibility just because it isn't my fault. Here is an area where I think women shine. Women will take responsibility for change even when the mess was already there when they walked in.

In fact, I am going to challenge myself to find two opportunities to change something; one that I will get no benefit from other than self satisfaction and the other that I will get some benefit from even if it is in the unforeseeable future.

To achieve this I am going to change my mind set from "What should I do about this?" to "What do I want to do about this?". There is a huge paradigm shift between those words should and want. We women tend to have many more things we should do rather than what we want to do. I don't know about you but I get a sense of obligation out of the word should and blame follows when something goes wrong or shame when I fail. I think that changing something that I *want* to change will give me a sense of empowerment at the end of the quarter.

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"If you act {as if} there is inequality, then you get inequality", Maria Bailey, founder and CEO of BSM Media

with a human resource problem.

Back to Christopher's' final comment regarding females inadvertently giving up their power to their alpha male counterparts, at a recent Board Readiness Program Mentor's luncheon in Adelaide a mentor had very wise advise to give in response to a question regarding male board members marginalizing the 'token' woman. She had never been exposed to this type of behaviour on the boards that she has been on. Her response was that she believed that women allow themselves to be marginalized. In her experience she believed that no matter how strong and successful a woman is in business that it is still intimidating to walk into the board room for the first time. At this crucial time, it is easy to be intimidated by the situation (not the members) and allow personal behaviour that inadvertently marginalizes us in the eyes of the other board members. Once marginalized, through your own actions, or others, it is very hard to be heard.

Another indication that perhaps this article has something to it is another networking situation. A very successful business woman was introducing herself. She was asked if she had any board experience. Her response was quite apologetic in nature in that; 'The only boards I sit on are my family's business boards (which don't run like real boards) and two not-for-profit boards that I was *invited* on to.' Someone else responded wisely; kindly admonishing her not to be apologetic. Her family's businesses were well established and prosperous, regardless of how they ran their board meetings, and the invitations to the NFP boards were a recognition of her skills and accomplishments; without which, she would not have been invited. Apologizing for what it is we know or have accomplished seem to be a typically female behaviour; that was not mentioned in the article.

To continue along this line of being apologetic, I bought the book **Leading from the Front**. I don't remember why but it was a good investment on my part. I read 1 chapter every other week as I travelled back and forth to Perth last year. Chapter 9's title is *Say You're Sorry Only When You're at Fault*. I found this chapter very interesting in that we, as women, apologize a lot. We apologize for things not within our control, things we had nothing to do with, as an introduction to a conversation and sometimes when we really mean it. "I am sorry" are three words that women use too much both professionally and personally. I know I do it. Especially at home when what I am apologizing for is inconsequential or not my fault. Then I compound my mistake by failing to say it when I should.

So in concluding, here is my take away from my recent readings and interactions. Know who you are; what your strengths are as well as your weaknesses. Take on board the things you believe you should (alpha male or not); do it in a way that is true to who you are. Take mental note of things you firmly believe should never creep into your behaviour; hold yourself accountable when you slip. Filter through the rest to see if it has value; then throw the rest out with the garbage and forget about it.