

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP: ACHIEVING HIGHER LEVELS

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I had the pleasure of addressing the Women's Lawyers Association of Michigan on March 18, 2004 on the issue of women and leadership. The following is an excerpt from my comments :

Let's talk a little about core competencies. What do I mean? These are the things that drive us and our success. They have nothing to do with your "knowledge" or your training. I am assuming that you all know the law and know your jobs – I am not talking about what you need to succeed at a Company. I am talking about breaking through. Being a Leader in your organization. These are competencies you can work on at any stage of your career. Master them and they will take you to the next level.

Core Competency # 1 Initiative – you must have initiative. Remember – your mother told you about this one – she was right. Women with initiative actively attempt to influence their organization.

Core Competency # 2 Strategic Thinking – Think of the "big picture" - consider a broad range of factors in your decision making. CEO's are not paid to manufacture 5 million widgets – they are paid to create a vision and a plan so that the employees can develop and execute that plan to manufacture and sell 5, maybe 10 million widgets.

Core Competency # 3 Building networks – leaders have a system of internal and external relationships. They nurture these relationships on the giving and receiving end. You can not do it alone.

Core Competency# 4 Ability to set a vision – I mentioned this before. A leader understands where a company or organization needs to go to be successful and a leader shares that vision in a way that guides and energizes others.

Core Competency # 5 Developing Others – A leader mentors and coaches others to develop their leadership skills, knows how to delegate and gives people challenging assignments.

Core Competency # 6 Building High Performance Teams – this one does not come naturally to lawyers so I advise you to pay particular attention to this competency and work on it. An effective leader selects team members that will execute the plan, and develops in them a commitment to the vision. We, as lawyers, are trained to do it alone. Law school fosters that, trains it, but companies and organizations need team players and people who can lead teams.

Core Competency # 7 Passion to Win – an effective leader strives to succeed and over comes barriers (rather than creating them, which we, as lawyers are trained to do).

Core Competency # 8 Risk taking – an effective leader must take calculated risks supporting business goals and be willing to challenge traditional ways of doing things.

Core Competency # 9 Tough- minded – You must be willing to make hard decisions and empower others do so the same. You must tackle problems and concerns directly.

Last and most important is Core Competency # 10

Communicating and Listening – an effective leader demonstrates excellent written and oral communication skills and listens to truly understand other points of view before responding. Another one that is tough for us lawyers.

Now that I have laid out my "Letterman Top Ten List," for effective leadership – I turn it over to you to sit down and write your career plan.

- List the core competencies required to do the job you want.
- Evaluate your level of development in each.
- And get to work.

But, before you begin - I submit to you that:

"If you aim high, you will achieve higher levels."

The Women's Food Service Forum has done substantial work in the area of core competencies for professionals in the food service industry. The Core Competencies discussed in these remarks are based on that work.