

Wonder Women

BY
ELEANOR
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*FASTER THAN A SPEEDING STOCK TICKER. MORE POWERFUL THAN A MALE-DOMINATED BOARDROOM. ABLE TO LEAP COMPLEX PROBLEMS IN A SINGLE BOUND. WOMEN ARE USING THEIR **BUSINESS SUPERPOWERS** TO ELEVATE THEMSELVES—AND THEIR COMPANIES—TO PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINED HEIGHTS.*



Women bring certain strengths into the business environment that give them and their companies an edge. The capacity to multitask, nurture, listen, empathize, engage others and see issues differently than men enable women to build teams that engender business success. In the male-dominated information technology realm, female chief information officers exhibit a propensity for next-level thinking by viewing situations differently than men.

"That is a real strength," Cindy Riemenschneider, professor of Information Systems and Business Analytics at Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business, said. "Women also have strong process-oriented skills and are used to multitasking, especially if they are mothers and balancing those responsibilities. Women think about creative solutions."

DeAnn Bartlett, senior director of Global System Integrators and Global Partners in the Americas for VMware, agrees. Having worked for several Fortune 100 technology companies, she is often the only woman in the room.

"Typically, if you have a homogeneous group, they all approach problem solving the same way," she said. "As a female, I come at the problem differently."

In doing so, women employ strategic listening and engagement skills. Andrea Dixon, Marketing professor and executive director of the Center for Professional Selling at the Business School, notices these traits among college women.

"They have a level of proactiveness and preparedness," Dixon said. "There is the dedication to drive for closure and include others in the way the dialogue unfolds. Women are comfortable creating an engaged setting."

Super social skills

To cultivate engaged workplaces, women collaborate skillfully to bring diverse parties to the negotiating table to solve thorny problems. This probably can be traced to their socialization since early childhood. When young girls role-play as mothers and teachers, they are adept at bringing other girls into the game right away, whereas boys playing a game will make other boys wait to join when the game ends.

"Women form relationships with people of different ages, and relationships are the foundation of a successful business," Emily Hunter, chair of Hankamer's Department of Management, said. "A successful business person is constantly building and helping relationships to flourish. It is not that men are not good at this, but this tends to be a strength of women."

In academics or business, impacting people is a potent strength. Sarah Kennedy Ellis, Google Cloud's vice president of Global Growth and Demand, said, "The people impact in businesses is so often overlooked, but this is where women's superpower as leaders can come into play."

Whether male or female, effective leaders forge relationships through empathy and emotional intelligence.

"Men have these strengths too, but it is what I see for myself," Kennedy Ellis said. "I have awareness and empathy in sensing how my team is feeling. When you have a team that you have created by including people and making sure their voices are heard, you create psychological safety, which frees people to do their best work."

WOMEN FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT AGES, AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS.



EMILY HUNTER

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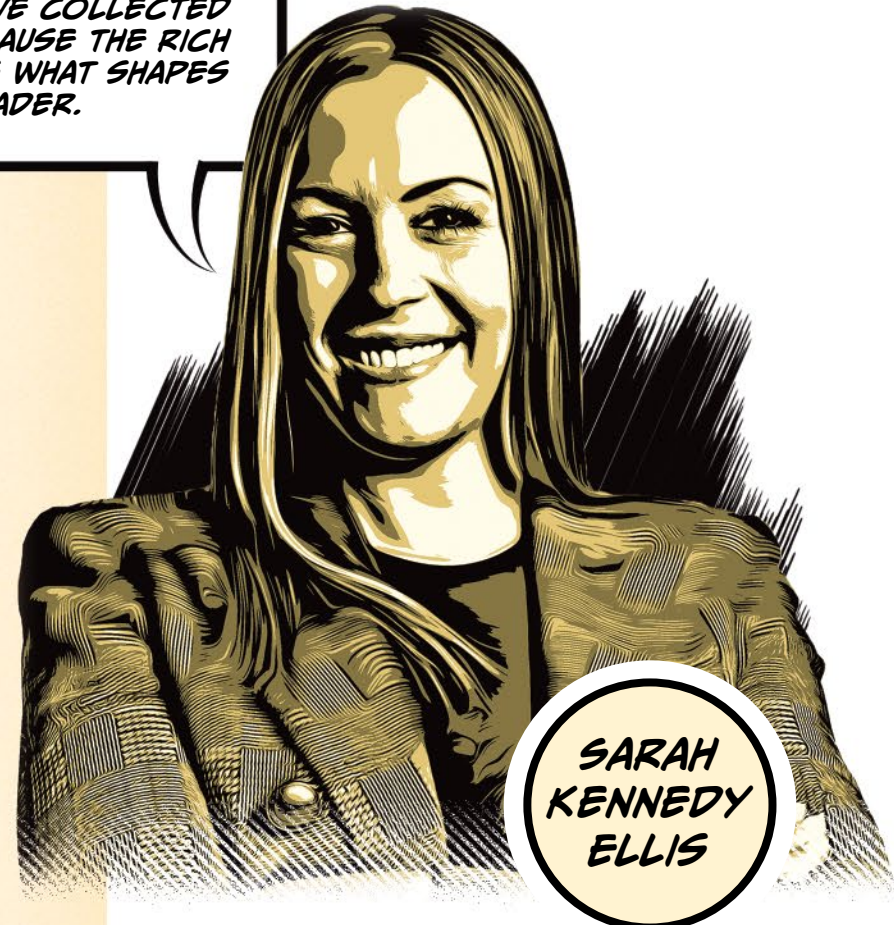
LINDA LIVINGSTONE

A dynamic duo: mentor and mentee

Executive women point to the value of relationships and an advisor network in helping them climb higher rungs and shatter the glass ceiling. In 2017, Baylor President Linda Livingstone became the first female president in the University's 172-year history. She joined the Hankamer School of Business' faculty in 1991 as an assistant professor of Management and later served as an associate dean of Graduate Programs. She left Baylor to assume leadership roles at Pepperdine University and George Washington University. Although many factors made Livingstone the optimum choice for president, including skills, experience, and strong academic and athletic backgrounds, Livingstone also had built supportive relationships at Baylor.

"Without me knowing, people were advocating on my behalf. It is important to build relationships so that people are advocating for you when opportunities arise. They may see opportunities where you might be a good fit that you might not be aware of," she said, citing several department chairs and others who afforded her leadership opportunities.

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SARAH KENNEDY ELLIS

Likewise, mentorships have been priceless in Kennedy Ellis' career, starting when she worked in the airline industry where there were not many female role models at the time.

"I had great male leaders who ended up being mentors and even sponsors for me," she said. "Almost every big opportunity in my career came from connections made through mentors. When I look at the greatest value I have taken away from each company where I have worked, it is the mentors I have collected along the way, because the rich tapestry of that is what shapes a great leader."

Bartlett said she wished she had known the importance of building a network of mentors early in her career. Besides mentors, she advised women to build a network of influential supporters in leadership.

"You need them to represent you if you are not in the meeting. Be sure people know what you can and want to do," she said.

Whether it is an occasional telephone call, casual lunch meeting or formal company program, female executives are paying it forward by advising other women—and men. Although extremely busy, Livingstone shares her knowledge with both male and female mentees.

"If I view them as someone with high potential and if my experience or insights could be valuable to them, I will engage in that," she said. "But leaders must be thoughtful about who we commit to and how much time we have to make sure we are going to be able to do what we say we will for them."

Finding time to be everyone's "hero"

Time constraints come with the territory as businesswomen attempt to achieve healthy work/life balance. They still shoulder a disproportionate share of family and household responsibilities. The pandemic escalated those issues with work-from-home arrangements, hybrid schedules and home schooling. Riemenschneider believes the pandemic set women back to the point that some have decided to quit work altogether to care for their families. Other women are load sharing with their spouses, tapping support systems, as well as hiring outside services for the home. However, businesswomen are finding ways to avert burnout as they realize they can have it all, but maybe not at the same time.

Trying to achieve work/life balance and overcome time constraints may cause women to question whether it is beneficial to move up in an organization. And as women assume more responsibilities, they may doubt their leadership abilities. They are not alone.

"The imposter syndrome may be framed as a gender issue, but men feel like imposters too, even if it is less acceptable to articulate," Hunter said. "We all feel like imposters sometimes."

Dixon acknowledged that perhaps society reminds women more frequently that it is permissible to articulate their feelings regarding self-doubt, while men are told to ignore it and push through.

No matter how the deck is stacked, women will continue capturing a bigger business platform as leaders. Livingstone advised men and women to be authentic in their leadership role.

"It takes a lot of courage to make hard decisions sometimes," she said. "You have to pair courage with humility."

Kennedy Ellis noted that as their careers advance, leaders will benefit from not associating too much of their identity with any position they hold. By linking too much of their value to a job, they become more fearful of losing it and take fewer risks. That makes them less effective leaders as a result.

Although that pesky glass ceiling exists in some areas, it is cracking as women devise creative solutions to difficult challenges. In the process, they are reaching down to help others up to the next rung, because that is what wonder women do. 🌟