“You can have anything you want if you are willing
to give up the belief that you can’t have it.”

Robert Anthony

“Sure [Fred Astaire] was great, but don’t forget
that Ginger Rogers did everything he did,
backwards…and in high heels!”

Bob Thaves
Women in Leadership: Your Leadership Identity

According to a study by Caliper Corp (Talent Management Group), women leaders are more persuasive, assertive, and driven to get things done, and they are more willing to take risks than male leaders.ii Also, they’re more empathetic and flexible and have stronger interpersonal skills. Furthermore, research by Catalyst found that companies with sustained high representation of women—that is, three or more women board directors in at least four of five years—significantly outperformed those with no women on the board as board directors.iii

The bad news: Companies should be actively recruiting women to be leaders in their organization and participate as board directors, but this is unfortunately not always the case. As of 2010, women make up just 3 percent of Fortune 500 chief executives, and under 16 percent are Fortune 500 corporate officers. The numbers are similar or worse in other countries around the world.iv Only 8 percent of technology start-ups are led by women, and only 15 percent of senior management in all industries are women.v

Obviously, women face a variety of challenges that hinder their desire to reach leadership positions. We’ll take a look at those challenges, but more importantly, we’ll look at how women can maximize their strengths and build their skills to become effective leaders in any organization.

Women make up an increasing share of the educated workforce. It is shown that organizations with a higher representation of women leaders deliver better financial results. Organizations with diverse teams deliver better results.

Gender equality and pay equality are top topics trending today. Women need to be prepared to unleash their leadership potential and grow their skills to take advantage of the need for more women in leadership roles. Understanding the leadership competencies required and the unique challenges women face in today's world are critical.
Leadership Competencies

According to the USA Today (November 19, 2015), the United States fell to 28th place on a yearly list of the world's most and least equal countries for men and women, behind countries including Iceland, Rwanda and Germany. The drop is mostly due to U.S. wage similarity for similar jobs dropping and fewer women in high government positions.

As quoted in the USA today, "Gender roles are changing, as men are taking on more responsibilities at home regarding childcare and housework." Therefore, the trend is shifting.

Requirements for effective leaders have evolved. Change is taking place rapidly, and leaders must provide support and lead through the changes. Leaders must embrace versus fight, and innovate or miss opportunities. Leaders, particularly female leaders, must constantly re-invent themselves as competition is extremely tough, and they must demonstrate resilience – the ability to lead effectively through the toughest challenges.

Focus on your strengths

Women, who focus on their strengths, drive their performance and job satisfaction. It is hard to become great at something that is a strong weakness. This is frustrating and results in only achieving an adequate skill level at best. To optimize performance, strive to focus on a few behaviors- talents you are great at and where you can truly excel.

Some of the top reasons for focusing on your strengths include:

- Building on what you are good at helps you to reach your highest potential and plays to your best self.
- Gaps (weaknesses) drain our energy - strengths make us happily engaged and more productive.
- Strengths create positive energy.
- Studies show that greater success is achieved by focusing on strengths.
- Most return on investment is achieved by focusing on strengths.
What gives you positive energy and enjoyment? Think about behaviors that you have you received feedback about that are consistently positive? Is there one prominent weakness that is getting in your way and is easily fixable?

**Back at the office activity:**

**STOP/START/CONTINUE Exercise**
In a 360 Evaluation, you have a team member complete an evaluation about you. This is a simple version of a 360 Evaluation. Have a team member answer the statements below about you. Review the completed answers. Are you aligned with everyone’s perception of you?

Jot down 3 top behaviors you should **stop** doing
Jot down 3 top behaviors you should **start** doing
Jot down 3 top behaviors you should **continue** doing

**Exercise 1: Identifying Skills to Improve**

*Instructions:* Review your self-assessment. Pick the top three skills or traits that you would like to work on improving. List your **top priority on the line corresponding to the red circle,** your **second priority on the line corresponding to the light blue circle,** and your **third priority on the line corresponding to the dark blue circle.**
**Back at the office activity: Assess Your Strengths and Weaknesses**

- **Instructions:** Answer these questions to determine not only your strengths and weaknesses but also how to leverage them in your workplace.
- What skills and abilities are currently valued in your organization? What skills and abilities will be needed in the future based on where the organization is heading?
- How do your skills and abilities fit with what is valued and needed in your organization? Where are the similarities and differences?
- How can you make the most of your strengths and compensate for your shortcomings?

**Stereotypes About Women as Leaders**

As we examine the reasons that women are under-represented in top leadership positions, the first place we will look is in our society and how our perceptions and beliefs shape the opportunities that women are given—or not given—in the workplace.

A Catalyst study found that women and men have the same ambition to reach higher levels of leadership, but women face additional barriers. One of the biggest barriers is stereotyping, which misrepresents the true talents and skills of women leaders, undermining their chances for career advancement. The study found that women leaders were perceived as:

- Having more “caretaker” behaviors, such as supporting others and rewarding subordinates.
- Being less effective at “take charge” behaviors, such as delegating and problem-solving.

Also, the study found that these perceptions were not validated by observation of actual leadership behaviors. Alice H. Eagly, one of the authors of *Through the Labyrinth*, suggests that women in high-level leadership positions exhibit similar behaviors as their male counterparts. Her theory is that women have to navigate a “labyrinth” of challenges and obstacles, and only those who use the same leadership behaviors as men make it through the labyrinth.
The dilemma for women
A separate report by Catalyst\textsuperscript{vi} found that women leaders face a dilemma that male leaders don’t as a result of stereotyping.

- First, women leaders are perceived as too soft or too tough, but never just right.
- Second, women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men.
- Third, women leaders are perceived as competent or likable, but rarely both.

Some good news
On a more positive note, women leaders display more of the characteristics associated with “transformational” leadership—they are inspirational, they empower others, they act as positive role models, they encourage followers to take initiative and be creative, etc. In other words, women have the potential to be more effective leaders than men.\textsuperscript{viii}

Lack of self-confidence
Research from the Hay Group found that women may avoid pursuing certain tasks because they lack confidence in their ability to succeed.\textsuperscript{ii} When given a choice between selecting a leadership task or a group-member task, women were more likely to choose the group-member task when they lacked the confidence to complete the leadership task. Men, on the other hand, are less likely to choose a task based on their level of confidence.

Strong inner critic
Women seem to have a stronger “inner critic” than men.

- Women may have a more deep-seated fear of rejection than men.\textsuperscript{iii} As a result, women may hold themselves back when they are uncertain of the outcome.
- Women themselves may internalize society’s negative beliefs about their ability to fill leadership positions and perform challenging tasks,\textsuperscript{iv} causing them to underestimate their leadership abilities.

Becoming an authentic leader means that you accept yourself for who you are. Everyone has different approaches to life, likes and dislikes, and skills and talents. You have to recognize what you do well and your limitations.

The changing world
The business world has changed dramatically and as a result, the critical skills needed to succeed as a leader and particularly as a female leader have evolved. Boundaries have blurred – and roles are more connected and dependent on one another. Today collaboration is key—those who cannot effectively collaborate will fail. The rate of
change has accelerated significantly and the ability to lead through change and
demonstrate flexibility and resiliency will be key to the future success as a leader.

Client needs have evolved significantly, and consumer-oriented self-service demands
are the norm- with mobile social and the internet of things a daily reality that impacts
how employees want to be served. Privacy and security are top of mind for businesses,
regardless of size. Embracing technology and staying fresh and current are key.

Compliance complexity continues to increase- with a high percentage of businesses
looking to expand globally and the new regulations such as the Affordable Care Act
require that you continue investing in ongoing learning opportunities.

Doing more with less - driving productivity and efficiency while delivering high quality
are business imperatives. Demonstrating the ability to provide useful data and analytics
that give insight into the most important asset a business has - their employees - has
become even more valuable.

Class Discussion: What types of changes have you had to lead through?

Unusual Challenges Women Face

Organizational challenges and barriers
The next challenge for women is organizational. An extensive study by McKinsey
looked into how women contribute to the U.S. economy, how their work benefits
individual organizations, and what prevents women from making even greater
contributions or reaching higher levels in those organizations. The results of the study
are described below

- Specific barriers that led women to remain at their current job level or leave their
  job for another include a lack of:
  - Role models
  - Inclusion in informal networks
  - A sponsor in upper management to create opportunities

- Many men (and women) eliminate women candidates for higher-level positions,
  assuming that they can't handle the additional work responsibilities along with
  their family responsibilities.

- Managers evaluate women and men for promotions differently:
  - Women's promotions are based on their performance.
  - Men's promotions are based on their potential.
The authors of *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders* offer additional insights about organizational barriers. They tell us that women have more difficulty:

- Fitting in with the organization’s culture—building social capital or strategic relationships.
- Obtaining desirable assignments that will help them get promoted.

**Unconscious bias**

Unconscious bias refers to a bias that happens subconsciously that we are unaware of and is based on our environmental, personal and cultural experiences. The result is quick judgments and assessments of people and situations based not on facts and skills, but on our subconscious beliefs. They are made outside of our control or awareness and have been observed in a variety of situations that include:

- Staff recruiting
- Promotions
- Performance appraisals
- Workload assignments
- Treatment of staff members impacting how they are viewed, valued or accepted by their peers

**Qualities of an effective leader**

**Model the behaviors you want to see in others**

- Demonstrate integrity and credibility at all times.
- Take action when it matters.
  - Stand up for yourself and others.
  - Show commitment versus compliance.
- Treat every employee as an individual.

**Communicate with passion and conviction**

- Make your message optimistic yet realistic.
- Use stories and action-oriented language.
- Use inclusive language: “we” versus “I.”

**Engage and involve others**

- Appeal to common beliefs and values.
  - Share organization, department, and team visions.
  - Acknowledge that similar values may be expressed in different ways.
- Share power, information, and responsibility.
- Encourage celebration of milestones, interim accomplishments, and partial wins.
• Recognize effort and initiative as well as tangible success.
• Foster collaboration.
  o Notice and reward cooperation among employees.
  o Develop team goals that require people to exchange diverse ideas and resources.
  o Encourage your staff to make connections with other individuals and groups in the organization.

Communicate With Confidence

The ability to be an effective communicator is one of the most important skills you must develop to succeed as a leader and grow your career. As you rise in responsibility, your ability to deliver clear messages in all mediums and to modify your delivery based on your audience is key. Your communications skills will impact how you are perceived and will play a large part in promote-ability to more senior roles.

Female leaders sometimes lack confidence and may shut down when they are in a mostly male peer group, even when they have the most knowledge on a topic. Delivering a confident message and making sure that our voices are heard is imperative.

If you struggle with speaking up, focus on making sure you comment or share your thoughts and opinions at least once in every meeting but make sure your input is thoughtful and valuable.

As female leaders, we need to guard against being perceived as emotional or defensive. If a workplace situation upsets you, be careful not to become emotional with your boss or peers. Identify a trusted mentor or friend you can go to for support. Before responding to an email or message regarding a controversial topic, take the time to reread your response to make sure it does not appear emotional or defensive and if possible, reach out to the person live.

Learning to deliver a crisp, concise message, being well prepared and focusing on being a great listener are also important.

To gain confidence, you need to take every opportunity to speak in front of groups. Seeking feedback from a trusted sounding board as you work to further your communication skills is extremely helpful.
Communication Tips

Nonverbal messages

Voice
Volume
Loudness has become synonymous with vulgarity and unruliness.
Soft volume has come to mean shyness, nervousness, and even incompetence.

Pitch
Lower pitch sounds more confident, authoritative, and credible.
Higher pitch sounds give the impression of being nervous, immature, lacking in confidence, or even slightly emotional and hysterical.

Rate
Speak at a slower rate to convey seriousness, authority, and thoughtful deliberation. A slow rate of speech implies well-chosen words and underscores the importance of the message.

Connecting
Moving closer
Show interest by moving closer to the other person or by standing up.
On the other hand, be respectful of personal space—it varies from person to person.

Using eye contact
Make direct eye contact and break after a few seconds.
Beware of cultural variations.

Nodding
A Nod to indicate you’re listening, i.e., “I understand,” “Keep going.”
Nodding may be misinterpreted as agreement; make sure you clearly express your opinion.
Adjust Your Communication Style To Empower Employees

Becoming listener-centered

Who is your listener?

- Big picture-oriented or detail-oriented
- Extremely busy or has time to talk
- Familiar with subject or needs explanation

The “charging rhino” syndrome

Symptoms

- Is oblivious to the listener’s frame of mind; doesn’t consider the needs of the listener
- Ignores or doesn’t see indications of confusion, existing knowledge, or disagreement in the listener
- Sticks to original plan no matter what

Cures

- Listen!
- Check for the listener’s frame of mind at intervals (not just at the end)
- Provide more basic explanation if necessary
- Skip ahead if the listener knows more than you expected
- If you’re on the receiving end of a “charging rhino”
  - Use body language to signal an interruption—raise hand, shake head, stand up
  - Interrupt politely. Escalate if necessary. “Ron, Stop. I’m not following you.”

Think partnership

- Think partnership
  - Maintain constant dialogue
  - Select key people from each team for accountability
  - Establish and distribute procedures
- Make it clear to employees that they are a priority
- Avoid appearing to reward friendship, clout, or poor planning
- The better you know your employees, the better you can anticipate their needs without having to make exceptions
- Constantly educate your employees, so they understand your capabilities and limitations
- Set up a system to get constant feedback from employees—and act on it
- Be a good employee yourself—give others the benefit of the doubt, understand their constraints, make your needs known clearly and early
Summary

Women have many natural capabilities and strengths that make them effective leaders and there is a growing focus on the importance of increasing the representation of women in leadership roles. However, women continue to face challenges that impact their ability to take advantage of this opportunity. Understanding these challenges and the tactics that you can utilize to navigate them is key. The business world has evolved, and the skills required to succeed have evolved as well.

Becoming familiar with the competencies needed to grow into an effective and successful leader is important. The competency checklist and action plan are tools you should use to continue developing your strengths in your everyday work life beyond our session.

Focusing on the further development of your top strengths is critical to unleashing your full leadership potential. Making sure that your view of your strengths is aligned with how others perceive you is important. You can use a formal 360 tool or the simple STOP/START/CONTINUE Exercise with your peers and team to validate your strengths.

Understanding your leadership style and the best tactics for relating to others styles will help improve your effectiveness.

Effective communication skills are directly linked to your ability to achieve higher level leadership roles. Understanding the perception challenges women face and working on gaining confidence will support your career growth.

It is an exciting time for women and with the right level of focus; you can take advantage of the growing need for women in leadership roles.

Back at the office activity: How do they perceive you?

Ask your peers and team members to describe you in three words. What are the words they used to describe you? Are their perceptions accurate? Reflect on why they may have chosen those words and what you can do to modify their perception.
References


ii. https://www.caliperCorp.com/portfolio/the-qualities-that-distinguish-women-leaders/


