



# Leading Women Executives<sup>®</sup>

Corporate Leadership Center

---

## **SHAPING YOUR FUTURE: PREPARING FOR THE PATH AHEAD**

**LEADING WOMEN EXECUTIVES  
2019 SYMPOSIUM**

**NOVEMBER 13, 2019 | CHICAGO**



## ABOUT THE EVENT

On November 13, 2019, Leading Women Executives held an event at Chicago's Mid-America Club, bringing Ambassadors, Advocates, and Sponsors together to focus on how best to shape their professional paths as leaders, innovators, and role models within a fast-changing business and social landscape. The event, co-hosted by Morningstar, featured wide-ranging discussions, including advice for creating a more purposeful path into one's professional future, and how to understand and address biases associated with the language of leadership in organizations. Attendees also had the opportunity to purchase items from the YWCA-sponsored YShop pop-up store during the networking sessions.

Daniella Levitt (Executive Director, Leading Women Executives) provided welcome remarks, followed by Cheryl Francis (Co-Chairman, Corporate Leadership Center and Co-Founder, Leading Women Executives and CEO Perspectives) recognizing Deborah Kolb as former Leading Women Executives Academic Advisor. Cheryl Francis welcomed panel moderator Bevin Desmond (Head of Talent and Culture, Morningstar; Leading Women Executives Advocate; CEO Perspectives Fellow, 2019), who introduced panelists Deb DeHaas (Advisor and Board

Member, Corporate Leadership Center; Vice Chairman, National Managing Partner of the Center for Board Effectiveness, Deloitte) and Betsy Holden (Senior Advisor, McKinsey & Company) for a discussion on "Shaping Your Future: Preparing for the Path Ahead."



Following the panel discussion, Sheila Penrose (Co-Chairman, Corporate Leadership Center; Co-Founder, Leading Women Executives and CEO Perspectives) introduced Dorri McWhorter (CEO, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago; Leading Women

Executives Speaker; CEO Perspectives Fellow, 2017), who made brief remarks, after which Robin Harris (CEO, Confidence Apparel and YShop Vendor) spoke of her professional journey. After a brief break, Daniella Levitt welcomed Amy Best (SVP & CHRO, Exelon; Leading Women Executives Ambassador, Spring 2011; CEO Perspectives Fellow, 2014), who introduced Leadership Development Workshop Leader Lori Mackenzie (Co-Founder, Stanford VMWare Women's Leadership Innovation Lab; Lead Strategist, Stanford Graduate School of Business). Lori presented on the nature, impact, and gender biases associated with the language of leadership. The workshop was sponsored by Exelon. Finally, Daniella Levitt offered closing remarks.

**WE ARE GRATEFUL TO ALL PRESENTERS AND PARTICIPANTS FOR SHARING THEIR INSIGHTS AND INTEREST.**

# SHAPING YOUR FUTURE: PREPARING FOR THE PATH AHEAD

During the event's panel discussion, panelists (and sisters) Betsy Holden and Deb DeHaas offered insights and advice regarding shaping a purposeful career path, based on their broad, deep experience across multiple, high-profile organizations and roles.



**LIVE YOUR VALUES,  
FIND YOUR BEST  
SELF, AND USE  
WHAT YOU LEARN  
TO DEFINE YOUR  
NEXT CHAPTER.**

## KEY INSIGHTS

### **DO YOUR BEST, FORGE YOUR PATH**

Raised in working-class Pennsylvania, the sisters learned values from their parents including honesty, a strong work ethic, and striving for excellence. Their mother was a rare female accountant in her generation, and both parents took on multiple civic responsibilities. "Go after what you want, not what others want you to," they learned.

### **DO RIGHT BY OTHERS**

As a leader at Arthur Andersen during its dissolution, Deb observed that "99%" of fellow leaders did the right thing. They looked out for others, communicated, and built trust. The network she created there and elsewhere has been a source of strength and support her entire career.

### **LEARN FROM EVERYTHING — INCLUDING ADVERSITY**

Betsy had been CEO of Kraft Foods and then Co-CEO after Philip Morris spun Kraft off in 2001, before her male CEO counterpart was chosen as global CEO in 2004. She didn't let the "painful" experience define her, using it to become stronger and drive impact in future leadership roles. The takeaway: live your values, find your best self, and use what you learn to define your next chapter.

## KEY INSIGHTS (continued)

### BENEFIT FROM BOARD WORK

Corporate and nonprofit board work represents large leadership development opportunities. Build your business/governance skills (industry, functional, digital) and look for board roles (private companies, private equity, associations) by networking, attending conferences, and connecting with others. Aim for organizations with missions you're passionate about. Be willing to say "no" to board invitations if it's not the right time.

### LEAD THE SISTERHOOD

Betsy worked hard to bring the proportion of women on Kraft's top management team to 40%. Inclusive, empathetic leadership will differentiate the leaders of the future and encourage people to bring their authentic selves. Look for opportunities to bond with women at all levels, to create a dynamic, opportunity-rich sisterhood. Reach down to be a sponsor (champion) and mentor (advice/support-provider) for junior colleagues. Pay it forward.

### FIND YOUR NORTH STAR

Your personal mission/development has seven areas: personal, professional, family, spiritual, physical, community and social. Understand what combination of these you're most passionate about and use that to guide your choices and decisions. Aim for "twofer" or "threefer" that satisfy multiple areas, such as being a coach for your child's sports team.



# THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

Lori Mackenzie, Co-Founder, Stanford VMWare Women's Leadership Innovation Lab, presented a dynamic, eye-opening workshop on the role language plays in personal branding and in our perceptions and expectations of leaders, especially as related to gender. The workshop included research-driven insights and practical advice for women navigating the world of work today.



**GENDER, RACE AND AGE ARE THE MOST COMMON DRIVERS OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS.**

## AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

Female political leaders like Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi are labeled “shrill” despite similar measured decibels to their male counterparts. While “disruption” is a ubiquitous theme in business, professional women have made little progress in the last decade. Silicon Valley and other settings claim to be “meritocracy”-driven, but research shows rewards are based largely on gender, race, and other fixed attributes. These trends and other evidence highlight the uneven playing field for women that stereotypes and other biases support.

It's a major problem: even a 1% bias against women within an organization can reduce the proportion of female leaders by 30% (from 50% to 35%). Small, unconscious bias leads to big inequality. We have to see what's difficult to see, understand our brains create illusions when it comes to evaluating others, and work actively to block the effects of gender-related and other biases.

## BEWARE BIAS AND STEREOTYPES

Bias drives errors in assessing talent, even when intentions are good: someone gets our benefit of the doubt; someone else gets increased scrutiny. Gender, race, and age are the most common drivers of unconscious bias. Even hearing a man's versus woman's voice changes our perceptions and interpretations. Bias affects expectations about individuals, how we process information, and ultimately decisions related to evaluations and opportunities, as part of a problematic cycle.

Gender-based stereotypes are among the most common cognitive-processing shortcuts. In one study, identical resumes received 72% positive response when the associated name was male, but only 44% for female names. Stereotype-based expectations mean more scrutiny for female professionals (“We need more evidence of your accomplishments”) and a generally higher bar (“Redo the analysis”) than for men, as part of a broad, persistent performance bias in the workplace.

# THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

(continued)

## DECODE THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

**Communication — especially word choices — undergirds bias and the gender-inequality status quo. Several related issues reflect this challenge for women professionals:**

**AGENTIC VERSUS COMMUNAL.** The stereotype of leadership is about “agentic” qualities/words (“big thinker,” “risk-taker”) versus “communal” ones (“team player,” “friendly”). This aligns with gender stereotypes: women are more likely to be seen as communal, and thus less likely to be seen as typical leaders. That’s true even when men and women display the exact same behaviors; they will be described and perceived differently.

**THE SELF-PROMOTION DOUBLE-BIND.** When women behave in communal ways, they are perceived as less capable. But behaving in more agentic, self-promoting ways yields perceptions of women as more competent but less likeable (seen as “off-putting, sharp-elbowed, aggressive,” as research shows). Asking for a promotion, too, helps men but not women. So women are expected to display agentic traits, but are penalized when they do.

**THE CURSE OF VAGUE FEEDBACK AND DILUTION.** A natural tendency is to be hesitant when communicating with outsider groups. So women tend to hear more vague feedback than male counterparts — for example, women receive about half as much feedback related to specific business outcomes. Female professionals are also more likely to receive diluted feedback: “She is helping run the organization with me.” Be aware of these often-subtle biases, which can diminish perceptions and opportunity.

**THE RIGGED RATINGS GAME.** As in the double-bind above, an evaluation of a woman as helpful or taking charge correlated with positive ratings only up to a point, whereas men viewed as assertive earned higher ratings. Similarly, vague feedback didn’t affect men’s ratings but hurt women’s, especially junior ones. Even among top-rated talents, women’s evaluations highlighted their personalities; men’s evaluations focused on leadership skills. The disparity runs deep and wide.



**WOMEN RECEIVE ABOUT HALF AS MUCH FEEDBACK RELATED TO SPECIFIC BUSINESS OUTCOMES.**

# THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

(continued)

## CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

**Rising women professionals can use the ideas here to harness the language of leadership strategically to diminish the effects of bias and forge a professional path of impact. Here are several practical tips:**

**BALANCE AGENTIC AND COMMUNAL WORDS.** Using both agentic and communal words, in combination, helps avoid stereotypes and communicates a broader view of leadership than the traditional agentic-centric one. “Drives and collaborates” and “Warm and ambitious” are examples.

**CREATE — AND GET BUY-IN ON — THE PERFORMANCE RUBRIC.** Generating clear performance evaluation criteria and getting agreement on these diminishes the likelihood that stereotypes will come into play. Think of evaluation criteria as part of rubrics similar to those used for class assignments: each dimension of performance is defined clearly, with concrete examples of performance warranting a given rating. This approach holds both performer and evaluator accountable, while aligning understanding.

**BE SPECIFIC.** Avoid the curse of vague feedback and dilution by using specific praise and feedback and linking these to impact wherever possible. Build feedback around specific business outcomes, for example, and beware subtle dilution that conveys stereotyped views or expectations.

**FIND YOUR POSSE.** Amidst the shifting landscape of expectations, evaluation criteria, and biased feedback, women need a cadre of supporters to view career dynamics through a feminist lens and provide support where needed. Find your posse of colleagues, friends, and sponsors that can provide these critical resources for the long term.

**UNDERSTAND THE AUTHENTICITY PARADOX.** Authenticity is deeply valued today, but our true selves evolve and some roles require behavior that may not feel authentic. The demand to “code-switch” (change language/behavior to fit the situation/group), for example, is especially high for women, people of color, and LGBTQ populations. Work to create a broader band of acceptability for behavior in your organization.

**AVOID THE CURSE OF VAGUE  
FEEDBACK AND DILUTION BY  
USING SPECIFIC PRAISE AND  
FEEDBACK AND LINKING THESE  
TO IMPACT WHEREVER POSSIBLE.**

# THANK YOU TO OUR CO-HOSTS

## SYMPOSIUM CO-HOST:

**MORNINGSTAR<sup>®</sup>**

## LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP CO-HOST:

 **Exelon<sup>®</sup>**

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

*Negotiating at Work: Turn Small Wins into Big Gains*, Deborah Kolb and Jessica Porter, Jossey-Bass, 2015.

"Taking Gender into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs," Robin Ely, Herminia Ibarra, and Deborah Kolb, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2012.

"The Authenticity Paradox," Herminia Ibarra, *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2015.



# THANK YOU TO THE YSHOP VENDORS





# Leading Women Executives<sup>®</sup>

Corporate Leadership Center

[www.leadingwomenexecutives.net](http://www.leadingwomenexecutives.net)

10 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 875 | Chicago, Illinois 60606