

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

April 2010

Three Factors for Career Success

By Shana Montesol Johnson

What does it take to become a female executive at a major corporation, and thrive in that role? Kristine Braden, MWF member and Global Banking Head of Citibank in the Philippines, spoke at the March MWF meeting on three factors to focus on to further your career – whether you work in a major corporation, or in another type of organization – namely, **organizational savvy, executive presence, and mentoring.**

Kristine was selected to participate in a Women's Leadership Development Program for "executive-ready women" offered jointly by Citibank and the Anderson School of Management at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). She shared some of the highlights of this three-day course in her MWF presentation, which took place at the lovely home of Shyamala Abeyratne.

Organizational Savvy

If you're interested in a senior position in a corporation, Kristine shared that managers and human resource (HR) professionals are looking for candidates with:

Experience in line jobs. These customer-facing positions are those that do direct work, rather than support functions. "Line" is a military term – from the "front line" in a battle.



MWF speaker Kristine Braden (left) and host Shyamala (right)

(Kristine shared that most large organizations in North America and Western Europe emerged after World War II, and came out of a military form of organization, so the use of terms like "line" are no coincidence.) Line jobs are the least likely to be cut if the organization faces tough times. Working in a non-line or staff job (e.g., HR, accounting, etc.), which generates

expenses rather than revenues, is less likely to lead to an executive position.

Profit & Loss (P&L) responsibility. Bringing in revenue, managing costs, or having control over a budget of some kind is valued for promotion to senior positions.

Operating experience. Being able to say "I ran this," rather than "I helped

(Continued on page2)

April MWF Meeting ■ **When:** Monday, 2010 April 19, 6:30 p.m. **Where:** Lilia Marulanda's home, 2 San Ignacio St., Urdaneta Village, Makati City. **What:** MWF member Melissa Alipalo will screen her documentary, *Dinosaurs on the Baywalk*. The 45-minute film examines the good, the bad, and the ugly of elections in the Philippines. It uncovers the comedic and tragic events of the Manila mayor's race in 2007—a timely re-examination of the democratic practice as the May 10, 2010 elections near. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **May Meeting:** Monday, 2010 May 17.

(Three Factors... From page 1) with this” is meaningful. Women often work as individual contributors to projects. If you’re angling for a senior position, it’s better to be able to show you managed people and businesses.

Problem-solving experience. “Every large organization is a huge bureaucracy,” remarked Kristine. “Be able to say you’ve solved a problem; show your problem-solving abilities and experience.”

Visible projects and roles. Kristine remarked, “Women like to sit on the sidelines and be good ‘worker bees.’ To say, ‘I’ll lead that project’ may be scary.” However, this kind of visibility will lead to subsequently higher levels of responsibility. Even just being visible to senior decision-makers you’re not working with can enhance your career. Kristine said that for one year, she was assigned to work in a group that was housed on the 50th floor of the Citi building in Hong Kong, where all the executives sat. Although she didn’t work directly with all of them, her visibility with the senior regional staff has helped her since then.

Being relevant. Be clear on how what you’re doing is helping the organization, rather than doing

something because “it’s good to do.”

Being strategic. Look for opportunities to be strategic, not tactical. For example, “I’m seeing this shift in the market, and this is how I think we should tackle it...”

Always practical, Kristine gave us a worksheet to take home and use to reflect on where we are today, what skills or experience we already have, where we want to go, what is missing to get us there, and how we can obtain that missing skill or experience to further our career.

Executive Presence

Kristine explained that women tend to communicate differently than men, mostly as a result of social conditioning that begins in childhood. For example, men make friends through bantering and “picking on each other.” Women bond differently – sometimes, by complimenting each other (e.g., “I like your outfit! You look great today.” How would that sound if you said that to a male colleague?).

She pointed out that as militaristic organizations, large corporations don’t play by female rules. While women don’t have to act like men to succeed, if we are not aware of how our default, “auto-pilot” behavior is perceived, we

may lose credibility with male peers and managers. This is why we need strategies to bridge the gap, build on our strengths and ensure that we come across with confidence and poise – while still retaining our feminine charm.

When men want to make a point, they speak at length about that point, sometimes going on and on about it to communicate how important it is to them. Women, on the other hand, let themselves be interrupted all the time. (One tip to deal with that – when interrupted, stand up, walk around the room and take the floor again.)

Men like to stress their achievements, and may even take credit for things they didn’t do, while women focus on being modest and highlight the effort of the team. Kristine emphasized that as women, we need to learn how to accept praise with dignity. She suggested employing the following response to a compliment, “Thanks. I really enjoyed working on this project.”

Kristine recommended that women give some thought to how they will most effectively communicate about who they are and what they do through “elevator speeches,” a prepared statement brief enough to

(Continued on page 4)

What is Executive Presence?

It is a sense of credibility that compels others to seek your opinions, to believe in your decisions, and to follow your direction.

Assess your current level of Executive Presence

- * Are you aware of your reputation? If you are, is it what you want it to be?
- * Are you often asked to join your peers and senior managers at the planning table?
- * Are you being groomed for increased responsibilities?
- * Do the CEO/President, senior managers, and peers seek you out for your opinion?
- * Are you asked to speak at company-wide events?
- * Are you asked to represent the company at highly visible community events?
- * Are you asked to engage with priority customers?
- * Are you included in the interviewing process of key individuals?

If you answer “no” to two or more of the above questions it’s time to work on your Executive Presence. (S.C. Gatton Copyright 2008)

National Association for Female Executives

The National Association for Female Executives (NAFE), is a division of the Working Mother Media, based in New York City. Established in 1972, NAFE is one of the largest organization of businesswomen in the [U.S.].

Through education, training, skill development, and networking, NAFE’s goal is to provide women with resources needed to succeed in the business world. NAFE has over 60,000 members; the average member supervises approximately five people at work, has at least a four-year college degree, and has a personal income of \$72,500.

The organization also publishes a quarterly magazine available to its member subscribers.

Female Executive Success: Six Major Barriers

According to Carole A. Adair in *Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Factors Influencing Women’s Attainment of Senior Executive Positions*, the six major barriers in the success of female executives are: (a) prejudice, treating differences as weaknesses; (b) poor career planning; (c) lonely, hostile, unsupportive working environment; (d) lack of organization savvy; (e) greater comfort in dealing with one’s own kind; and (f) difficulty in balancing career and family.

Old Girl Networks

More recently, to offset their isolation, professional women have developed their own “old girl networks.”

It is my impression, based on observation, that these female networks commonly feature open, visible membership, even dues, with explicit criteria revolving around professional background and interests.

As such, they are less like the traditional, covert, male informal networks and more reminiscent of the open, formal, but casual, associations described by de Toqueville ([1835] 1959) that included members from a broad range of backgrounds.

Here, too, resources are distributed, but with seemingly less attention to power, competition, and internal status differentials.

With some notable exceptions, these female professional networks thrive on inclusion and connection, potential models for the twenty-first-century workplace.

From *Connective Leadership: Female Leadership Styles in the 21st-Century Workplace* by Jean Lipman-Blumen (1992)

Organizational Savvy

Average performers think organizational savvy means playing office politics to get noticed by the right people. Star performers know that real organizational savvy is a strategy that enables them to navigate competing interests, promote cooperation, address conflicts, and get things done. (Robert E. Kelley in *How to be a Star at Work: Nine Breakthrough Strategies You Need to Succeed*, published by Times Books)

Males Mentoring Female Executives

According to William J. Heery in his article “Corporate Mentoring: Shattering the Glass Ceiling,” mentoring takes the form of guidance, counsel and, in many cases, access and exposure to the kinds of positions and assignments that allow the desired management skills to develop.

Women do not always benefit from this kind of mentoring because the issue is different. A senior executive is often concerned that the mentoring of a younger female might be viewed as having a less noble motive than

the promotion of a capable person with great potential. It leaves the well-intentioned executive open to more questioning and scrutiny than is comfortable. “Why,” asks the person, “should I endure the jokes, innuendoes or the appearance of impropriety, either a home or at the office? When in doubt,” he says, “don’t.”

On the other hand, when *USA TODAY* asked female CEOs, chairs and company founders to identify the one mentor who had the most influence on their careers, 33 of the 34 who responded identified a man.

(Del Jones in *USA Today*: “Often, men help women get to the corner office”)

Female Executive Dress Code

Smart dressing involves sending subliminal messages, particularly when a serious job is at stake.

This is something that even high-ranking business leaders can underestimate. “People don’t understand the messages that their clothes send,” says Dorothy Waldt, a New York executive recruiter. Women sometimes don’t realize how often a tight shirt or a low neckline comes across as seductive. People who meet them are likely to assume the sexual innuendo is intentional.

For ideas on looking authoritative but approachable, look at politicians—the most practiced job candidates of all—who are savvy at flashing messages with their clothing. Female politicians know what a tightrope fashion can be: Smart clothes might not win votes, but the wrong style can lose them votes. The wardrobes of female political candidates are so closely scrutinized that the media has reported who shops for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (her husband Paul).

In the ultimate employment interview, for U.S. President, Hillary Clinton wore a looped red scarf in the New Hampshire primary that looked decisive and framed her face, while her dark suit hit that

nice-not-loud note that signals that we’re supposed to be paying attention to her brain, not her designer.

We haven’t yet taken fashion analysis as far with well-known business executives. But job interviewers don’t miss much, says Ann Marie Sabath, a business etiquette consultant and author of “One Minute Manners.” She is relentless about getting interview clothes right. Her advice includes ironing creases into your pants, investing in a good watch, and wearing a collar. “A collar projects authority,” says Ms. Sabath.

Here are some ‘dressing to impress’ tips:

- * Dress for the position you want, not for the one you currently have.

- * The higher a woman climbs on the corporate ladder, the more light-colored suits she can and should wear (to be less intimidating).

- * Match the culture of the industry: Call ahead or have your personal coach find out the office’s style. When in doubt about a jacket, tie or other item, bring one along. You can take it off, but you can’t put it on if you don’t have it.

- * The definition of business casual: one notch down from business normal.

Source: *The Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 2008)

(Three Factors... From page 2) deliver between floors in an elevator. In terms of content, the elevator speech should explain what you do, using numbers if possible (e.g., explain how big your job is, your span of control, how much revenue you make, how many clients you cover). Share impact and achievements; use action words.

The *delivery* of the elevator speech should exude confidence and poise: stand up straight, shoulders low. Don't stay on the sidelines when you enter the room, but walk in confidently. Use a firm handshake and make direct eye contact. Use a low pitch of voice, and don't modulate your voice too much—it can be perceived as a sign of flirtation. Don't tilt your head, oversmile, or flip your hair, because it makes you look less serious. (Kristine acknowledged that these tips on delivery are most appropriate in a Western business context, so they may differ in countries like Japan.)

Rather than merely listen to this great advice, we had a chance to put it into action. We each practiced delivering an elevator speech to a partner seated next to us. Partners gave each other feedback on both content and delivery. It was helpful to hear constructive feedback from someone else, and the exercise underscored the importance of practicing and being prepared.

Mentoring

Kristine remarked that having a mentor can have a significant impact on one's career advancement – one

study of MBA graduates found that those with mentors had an annual compensation on average US\$22,454 higher per year than those without mentors. In addition, people with mentors are more likely to be promoted, earn more money, have a career plan, be happier with work, and become mentors themselves.

There are many types of mentors, including *sponsors* who support your advancement in the organization or profession; *protectors* who provide a buffer for negative career outcomes or damaging consequences; *challengers* who offer access to 'stretch' assignments for visibility and skills development; *coach mentors* (different from a professional coach) who give you advice on task and performance-related skills and work competencies; *networkers* who link you to others or opportunities to enhance your reputation in the organization; *affirmers* who validate you in terms of knowledge, skills, experience or contribution to the organization; *role models* who represent the valued organizational norms or competencies and define the kind of person you want to be; *counselor mentors* (different from a professional counselor) who advise you on professional and personal boundaries and give social support; and *friend* mentors who provide a trusting relationship involving social and personal interaction.

Kristine suggested that we all develop a "mentor radar screen" and ask ourselves, for each of the 9 mentor types outlined above, *who*

meets this need now and who could meet this need. She challenged us not to use the same name more than twice and encouraged us to cultivate relationships with people who can meet those needs.

All in all, it was an enjoyable and interactive evening that provided some relevant tips and strategies to thrive in large organizations.

Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Junie Navarro**, Message Board. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website. **Shari Virjee**, Programs, Message Board.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

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www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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