



The Campolo, Middleton, McCormick Women’s Executive Breakfast

by Karin (BluChip) Caro

Last week, I had the great pleasure of attending the Campolo, Middleton, McCormick Women’s Executive Breakfast, which brought together 75 high-level women in various occupations to discuss the leadership secrets of some of Long Island’s most powerful women. Two guest speakers, Christine Malafi, Partner at Campolo, Middleton, McCormick, LLP and Terri Alessi-Miceli, President of The Hauppauge Industrial Association took the lead to offer their insight and tips for success. With women comprising just 4% of corporate CEOs, 14% of executive officers and 20% of America’s government officials, we’re facing a persistent leadership gap at the highest echelons. To move forward, we must first take stock of what is working. The following leadership lessons, come directly from Christine and Terri; the women who know what it takes to get to the top.

Be Honest, Be Realistic & Communicate

The most successful women have learned that they have to have help, and they have to have faith in the people around them—at work and at home. It’s not easy, but it’s critical over the long-term. Christine advised the women to be realistic. Knowing the overall goals, what needs to be done and communicating effectively is really important for overall success. “I have kids, I can’t be present for certain hours, but I will work all night in order to get the job done.” She says. “I’m realistic about my life and the tasks at hand. I’m also honest and I communicate what I am doing so there’s no question how much I am doing or what I am doing. Being honest doesn’t just mean at work...it’s with your family too. Telling your children what you do and why is so important. For me, quality time isn’t about singing nursery rhymes...sometimes it’s a discussion about insurance law...I joke about this but speaking to the kids about my work has really made them understand exactly what I do.” Both women work hard at blending. “I don’t want to miss anything...at work or home so I balance. I will work all night so I don’t have to miss doing something with my son” Terri explained.

Stay Determined

Long Island's most successful women really want it and remain determined even in the face of obstacles. They have the skills, and they put the time in. But more importantly, they have the desire to do something great. Terri Alessi-Miceli knew her life goals. At 46 years old, she became pregnant and knew that although she was very excited to be a mom, her job at the HIA was important and she didn't want to give it up. She became the breadwinner of her family and her husband stayed home with her son. "We received a lot of ridicule for it. But I knew it was the right thing for my family and the community. I was on a mission to do something great and I couldn't give it up" Terri explained.

Have A Mentor

Both Christine and Terri suggest having a mentor. Mentors can come in any gender and male mentors are crucial where women commonly hit the glass ceiling and have yet to reach the highest level of leadership.

Terri revealed that her grandmother was her first mentor and then at the HIA, was Jack Kulka. "When I took over, the organization was restructuring. I really wasn't looking to change careers. But Jack made me feel inspired. He worked with me to have a clear plan. I will never forget that he told me, 'You're a business-person. You're not a women in business. You could be anything. You could be any sex or any race. It doesn't matter.' These words continue to stay with me as my philosophy is that I practice being a business. I practice building culture and more importantly, I worked ON the business before I worked IN the business. These are crucial values Jack taught me."

Be Courageous

All of the women in the room showed their courageousness. There were discussions on how they aren't fearless. They move toward their fear to continually change themselves. Women at the top need to have the courage to move into roles they may have never done before. To learn something new and pay attention to the fears but don't let them hold you back. "If you're not a little bit scared every day, you're not learning. And when you're not learning, you're done." Christine said of her changing law firms. "Create a clear plan and put yourself in it. Then, go above and beyond on a daily basis" states Terri.

Remain Disciplined

It takes discipline to achieve and maintain success. You simply can't do everything, and Long Island's most powerful women stay focused on the areas that will have the biggest impact—from both a leadership perspective and a career management perspective. Terri is always looking to get new members and create new agendas for the HIA.

Interestingly, when asked what the biggest challenge is, she said: "Making sure people stay focused on what's important and what matters most. It is very easy to get distracted by new trends and new projects—but when you extend yourself too far, the quality of your work suffers across the board. I work hard at blending. I don't miss anything. I work at night and I do what I have to do."

She also shared with the audience, "I never forget that I am always selling myself. Each day. We aren't taught to boast. I learned that the ability to sell yourself and your idea is not mutually exclusive."

This was one event I didn't want to end because of the camaraderie and connections in the room. There was one lingering message that we can help teach our new generations of girls and women; that they have choices and are in charge of their own destiny and that destinies can change along the way...but don't let anyone stop you.

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