CRAIGHEAD ASSOCIATES LLC

BUSINESS CONSULTANTS

Change Management, Innovative Solutions, New Leadership

Women In Leadership

Project Report

January 2010

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We are pleased to present our report on the interview phase of our Women in Leadership project. The project was launched September 1st, 2009, when we began conducting interviews by telephone. We started with a modest list of approximately 15 women; however, the list grew quickly, ultimately reaching 158 women, thanks to participant referrals and male supporters who opened many doors for us. We ended on December 16th with 102 interviews completed.

The question of anonymity was a consistent concern as a condition for unabridged and unrestrained conversations. This report is written with a keen eye to honor our promise to protect the privacy of our participants.   Furthermore, the participant list will not be made available to the public.

METHODOLOGY:

This is not a scientific analysis in that it has no statistical predictability. What is provided is an anecdotal analysis of a series of in-depth inquiries conducted with 102 successful women who shared their experiences, wisdom and current thinking in the fields of business, education, government, healthcare services, manufacturing, financial services, law, accounting, lobbying, sports, engineering, a range of non profits, and homemaking. The aim of each interview was for the participant to momentarily suspend time and reflect by recalling her experiences of the trials, tribulations, victories and successes on the path to her present occupational success. We use the term *experiences*, a term which implies personal and irrefutable. In other words, there can be no right or wrong, correct or incorrect experiences. It is our intention that this collection of responses shed new insights that have the potential to impact us all individually and collectively in the realm of leadership effectiveness.

It was particularly rewarding for us that for the most part participants used the interview process to create value for themselves. As the conversations concluded, the majority of interviewees expressed that they had a greater appreciation of themselves and their achievements. In many instances participants said they had valuable insights; others were reminded of unknown strengths that served them well on their journey to success.

The interviews followed the following format:

> Individual Information: age grouping; Northeast Pennsylvania native or out-of-state; job title; primary accountability; degree/training.

> The following questions were asked and discussed:

> 1. What are your experiences as a women in the world of business, healthcare, education etc.?

> 2. How have those experiences influenced your leadership?

> 3. What do you see as missing in order to be a more effective leader?

> 4. What sustains you?

> 5. What stops you?

> 6. As you have met the challenges of being a leader, what surprises have you learned about yourself?

> 7. What do you see as possible – What is your vision?

> 8. What contribution(s) do you see that you make to insure this possibility becomes a reality?

A breakdown of the statistical data on the participants can be found in Appendix A. Additionally, we have included selected responses to the first six questions in Appendices B-G. *(Note: The participant responses are not available in the web report, but are available on request.)* Some responses have been edited so that a respondent could not be identified by her remarks. The intent of sharing these responses is not to focus on the story in the background but rather to appreciate the holistic struggles and accomplishments of the women. A truism for us all to apply here is that we have more in common with each other than our perceived differences. Keeping this adage in mind allows us to learn great lessons from each other.

ANECDOTAL ANALYSIS

How the project came about

The original intent for this project was to design a leadership program for women. As a consulting firm, our core practice centers on Change Management, Innovative Solutions, and New Leadership. I was reading an article one day on marketing and women, and it prompted the idea that it would be neat to design a program for business women of northeastern Pennsylvania.   My next thought was: the best way to find out what women would want in a leadership program would be to ask them. This gave me the idea to do the interviews. As most of you are aware, the project quickly took on a life of its own, and it proved to be a true learning experience for us which promises a value well beyond what we initially imagined.

A word or two about leadership

The subject of leadership is a passion of mine, so I'd like to say a couple of things about it before getting into the analysis. The Institute for Corporate Productivity conducts an annual survey of North American companies in which executives are asked to rank 120 different issues facing businesses. Leadership is constantly ranked highest. In fact, leadership has landed in the number one spot every year since 1997.

You can't pick up a newspaper today without reading about some failure of leadership in virtually every segment of our society. Polls show that half the American people are not proud of their national leaders, and three quarters say that without better leadership we are headed for a decline. In its 2008 National Leadership Index, the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Merriman River Group released poll results showing that 80 percent of Americans believe that the United States faces a leadership crisis today – up from 77 percent in 2007 and 65 percent in 2005. You just can't take a good potential leader and throw him or her into a dysfunctional briar patch and expect success. Without significant changes to the model, this is a recipe for repeated failure.

In my view, it is going to take a new and innovative approach to leadership in order to impact its effectiveness and relevance to society. It's not simply a matter of throwing out known leadership practices; it's continuing to implement what works while simultaneously inventing what's needed to move forward into a very different world than most of us are prepared for.

The Participants

One of the take-aways that Beth and I appreciated most was the privilege and personal enrichment we experienced as we got to know these extraordinary leaders. One participant suggested an excellent book titled How Remarkable Women Lead by Barsh, Cranston, and Lewis. The title sums up my experience of this project. The interviewees covered a broad range, from international CEOs to regional business owners, to school superintendents and a homemaker. There were senior academic leaders, CEOs of fortune 1000 companies, and local business people whose work and voluntary commitments impact our everyday lives; healthcare leaders who work passionately to make sure we have the very best; government leaders who daily stand in the face of adverse conditions to insure the people will be served; and a large number of entrepreneurs, many of whom started with minimal resources and even less support. Added to the demands of professional excellence for many of these women are the additional responsibilities of family, parenting, and parent-care.

Not surprisingly, the women we talked with are highly educated and trained. Ninety-eight percent have some form of college degree and/or professional designation. Our homemaker, who is not in the marketplace but chose instead to manage a high-income family of five, holds a Masters Degree.

There was a pronounced need expressed for more women mentors. Many women also noted that they found men to be better mentors than women. One woman's remark revealed a key insight to this situation: "Mentoring!" she exclaimed. "Let me tell you, I was the mother of two infant children with colic, caring for an elderly parent, teaching and working on my Ph.D., with a traveling husband. If I had time to spend over a cup of coffee it would have been to keep awake!" So another side of this issue we must take into account is that women, far more than men, typically take on additional responsibilities that could make them less available for mentoring. This should be kept in mind regarding this dilemma.

We heard many acknowledgements of forward-thinking male leaders who provided seminal support and helped women to advance. Conversely, there were also unsettling reports of instances of male confrontation and harassment.

Two phrases emerged consistently: the "Old Boy's Network" and "We've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go." Some also indicated the rise of an "Old Girls Network," which they felt to be counter-productive. Many participants complained that they find women are not generous in their support of other women. However, several of our interviewees have taken a strong stand to support young women as they enter the field of business and help them to get what they need, both academically and culturally.

Of all the characteristics that distinguished our participants, most notable was an indomitable commitment to succeed regardless of the circumstances. A phrase that we heard again and again was the adage: "Do whatever it takes." This quality was most often attributed to traditions and values learned from family.

Finally, one of the most surprising findings was that the conversations with natives of Northeast Pennsylvania were virtually indistinguishable from the conversations conducted across the country. In every occupation and domain, women leaders from coast to coast, in the north and south, are dealing with the same issues. Unquestionably, these are universal conversations.

Conclusions and Opportunities

Unfortunately, it remains the case that women in the workplace contend with inequities in compensation, advancement and professional recognition. An excellent article in Harvard Business Review titled "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership" points out that it's not only a glass ceiling but a collection of barriers and obstructions that women confront all the way along the path to the highest levels of leadership. It is notable that the article was written in September 2007 but is still relevant today. As our interviews soundly demonstrated, there is an abundance of talent largely untapped on the world stage. Given the state of leadership today, to not utilize all available talent is a miscarriage of opportunity.

The pathway out of this dilemma will not be the benevolence of men, but will come in the form of evidence of the potential profitability of making the change. Men in power have proven a willingness to disregard mores for the sake of profit. This interview process convinced me that, while there are specific, fundamental differences between men and women, the thing that will move leadership forward is to see that these essential differences offer the possibility for a powerful collaboration of skills and strengths.   The maximum optimization of this partnership could be the difference-maker in leadership competence.

So how can we take the openings from this small endeavor and empower the results of this project for the greater good? I stated earlier that the project was originally intended to create a leadership program for women. I no longer believe that is needed. Instead this project clearly points to the need for leadership excellence across the board that includes men and women pooling their talents and working in concert. This is where we will focus our efforts by creating a venue to promote a new kind of leadership.

APPENDIX A

STATISTICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Ages:

20-29 ……. 1
30-39 …… 16
40-49 …… 31
50+   ……. 54

Position/Title

CEO/President …. 30
C-Level …….……. 35
Director/Mgr……. 36
Homemaker ……… 1

Type of Organization

Business …………. 49
Financial ………... 10
Healthcare ………. 9
Legal ……….….... 2
Non-profit ……….. 9
Education ……….. 15
Government ……. 7
Household ……….. 1

Level of Education/Designation

Associate Degree ……… 2
Bachelors Degree …… 45
Masters Degree ………. 42
Ph.D. ……....…..……..... 7
LLD ……….…....…….….... 2
CPA ……….…....…….….... 2
No degree …………………. 2

APPENDIX A

STATISTICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

(continued)

Total number of referrals ... 158

Telephone interviews conducted ... 98

In-person interviews conducted ... 2

Email interviews conducted ... 2

Declined/no response ... 56

Northeast Pennsylvania natives ... **49**

States outside Pennsylvania ... 10
> California
> Florida
> Kentucky
> Massachusetts
> New Jersey
> New York
> North Carolina
> Texas
> Virginia
> Wisconsin