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Research Shows Female Executives Not Successful When They Act Like Men
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Companies:
Company Name: Hay Group Inc

Abstract:

Debunking this traditional belief, new research from The Hay Group in Boston, suggests most successful women executives use a blend of masculine and feminine leadership styles. They know when to be directive, authoritative and lead by example -- common masculine archetypes. But they also know when to lead by being more nurturing and inclusive -- feminine archetypes.

The Hay Group studied 45 highly successful women executives who had exceeded profit and performance expectations and reached senior leadership positions in mostly Fortune 500 companies, including Pepsico and IBM Corp. Researchers also studied 44 successful male executives, 34 less successful women and 40 less successful men, surveying the employees who reported directly to each of the four groups.

It doesn't matter if you're male or female, successful managers must possess a good tool kit of management skills, said Wes Kasbaum, president of Priority Management training firm in Oklahoma City. Critical skills include planning, execution and strategic thinking, two-way account ability, influencing skills, conflict resolution and basic people skills, including interpersonal communications, body language and emotions, he said. Copyright 2003, The Daily Oklahoman. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News.

Full Text:

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Oct. 5--There is a woman executive who is infamous for holding marathon meetings with her senior managers. Legendary within her company for her withering gaze and "cut you no slack" manner, she doesn't allow bathroom breaks in her meetings.

When she needs a break, she simply heads toward the ladies room, expecting her staff to follow and continue the discussion. Her female subordinates join her in the rest room, where they sometimes are asked to pass papers over the stall.

These parades to and from the rest room are the most demoralizing example of Jill Hudson's former boss' insensitivity to her staff, said Hudson of Oklahoma City.

"Trying to communicate with your boss over the sound of the toilet flushing is ridiculous," Hudson said.

It's a far-out example, experts say, of the symptoms of a common delusion among some female executives. They believe they need to act like a man to get ahead in business.

Debunking this traditional belief, new research from The Hay Group in Boston, suggests most successful women executives use a blend of masculine and feminine leadership styles. They know when to be directive, authoritative and lead by example -- common masculine archetypes. But they also know when to lead by being more nurturing and inclusive -- feminine archetypes.

Women who rely predominantly on masculine leadership styles, the study found, create the weakest work environments.

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"We found women can't get away with the command-and-control style that many men employ," said Ruth Jacobs, director of research at The McClelland Center in Boston, a research division of human resources firm, the Hay Group. Employees, she said, tend to give more leeway to male managers with coercive styles of leadership.

But when women act against their stereotype, employees are less forgiving, Jacobs said.

"They give feedback like 'bitch,' 'disempowering,' 'not clear what she wants from me' and 'we're not working as a team,'" she said.

The opposing standards are unfair, at least one industry observer says. Meanwhile, say local training experts and female executives, women leaders should be themselves and capitalize on their strengths.

"The easiest way to undermine female power in the workplace is to point to a woman acting like a man and call her a bitch," said Penelope Trunk, a New York-based career columnist for Business 2.0 magazine. "There is no male counterpart to this term, because men who exhibit such traits are promoted."

For hundreds of years, men have succeeded at work by mimicking those

in power, Trunk said. For women to be on an equal playing field, they need to be able to mimic the men in power, she said, since there are so few women. Women hold about 50 percent of the middle-management jobs, but less than 15 percent of the senior ones, Jacobs said.

"If most successful women in the workplace are using a blend of male and female traits, then this is another bolt holding up the glass ceiling," Trunk said. "To be one of the most successful women, one has to magically create a new style while having no one above them as a mentor of this style."

It doesn't matter if you're male or female, successful managers must possess a good tool kit of management skills, said Wes Kasbaum, president of Priority Management training firm in Oklahoma City. Critical skills include planning, execution and strategic thinking, two-way account ability, influencing skills, conflict resolution and basic people skills, including interpersonal communications, body language and emotions, he said.

Most of the senior female executives he knows possess all of those skills, Kasbaum said.

"My gut tells me that they had a price to pay, and worked really hard on these things to succeed," he said.

Women tend to have a good radar when it comes to relationship issues and people working together and collaborating, said Darcie Harris, co-owner of EWF International.

"They approach business like their personal life and consider the ramifications -- not just what needs to be accomplished," she said.

But, because of their natural empathy, women leaders can have a more difficult time setting limits and holding people accountable, Harris said.

"If women can get comfortable with the idea of being the boss, and that not everyone is going to like them, they usually settle into successful leadership styles," Harris said. Women who are not comfortable, she said, tend to overcompensate and shut down on the softer part of their themselves.

As director of operations for CompOne Services, an Oklahoma City-based medical billing company, Tammy Moore said she had to "toughen up."

"I expected everyone around me to be as committed to the company - - and to perfection -- as I was," Moore, 39, said. "I had to learn to quit taking everything so seriously and personally."

Her most difficult challenge has been discharging employees.

"Every time you're dealing with people, you're dealing with their lives," Moore said. Under her leadership, the company went from 220 workers to 158, and turnover dropped from 30 percent to 10 percent.

Along with being authoritative, Moore said she maintains an open-door policy.

"People can walk in here and tell me whatever, professionally or personally, and I'll listen to them," she said. "I'd rather be that way than a cold

fish."

Beth Pauchnik, managing director for legal and regulatory affairs at Integris-Health, refuses to make successful leadership a gender issue.

"If you give it attention, you give it merit," Pauchnik, 44, said. "I let my behavior speak for itself."

That behavior, she said, includes participatory management, candor, consistency, honesty, working alongside people, dignity, thoughtfulness, compassion and availability.

Hire the best people and let them show you what they can do, said Joe Anna Hibler, former president of Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

"If you micromanage, it will weaken your team and wear you out," Hibler, 64, said.

Women should be willing to speak up in meetings, said Pattye Moore, president of Sonic Corp. said.

"Risk throwing out an idea or asking a dumb question," she said.

Most of all, be yourself, Moore, 45, said. "I've never felt like I needed to learn to play golf or smoke cigars," she said. "I'll never become one of the boys, but I feel very comfortable around them."

SIDEBOX: SUGGESTED READING

"What's Holding You Back? 8 Critical Choices for Women's Success" by Linda S. Austin

Credit: The Daily Oklahoman

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