

Leadership Excellence



7 STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

- **Bonnie Low-Kramen,**
Founder and CEO, Ultimate Assistant
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5 Ways To Encourage Women To Move Into Leadership

Ideas to shift the leadership mentality in your organization

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Here is a question for managers in the workplace: **Do your women employees see themselves as leaders?** I've surveyed many groups with this question and at best I receive a lukewarm positive response. Some of these women think their jobs aren't big or important enough; others feel like they have no significant voice. Some women feel that their bosses won't "let" them be leaders; others, frankly, haven't really thought about it.

Even though we've made noteworthy strides in the number of women leading, gender biases still exist and need to be overcome so that women in leadership is a regular topic of thought. It's time to transcend arcane images of leaders and help the women on your team move forward energetically to claim places on the leadership spectrum. I invite you to use the principles below as conversation starters to help the women in your organization embrace leadership.

► **Principle #1: Leadership is a mindset.** If you are in a position where you influence outcomes, you are a leader. It all starts in your mind and has little to do with what your specific job entails. There is an axiom followed by many who want to improve their positions, and that is, "act as if." Think in terms of already being in an influencer role and you will begin to attract different behavior from others. All

employees on your team can begin to embrace the leadership mindset.

► **Principle #2: Leadership is not related to title or position.** After getting comfortable with leadership as a mindset, the next step is to act. Look around you and you'll see examples of this everywhere. The person who serves your morning coffee knows your order and places it when she sees you walk into the restaurant is a leader. The receptionist at your yoga studio who helps you quietly slip into the studio when class has already started is demonstrating leadership. Encourage the women on your team to find the situations where they can act as a leader.

► **Principle #3. Good managers facilitate the development of future leaders.** Managers, you're in the position to recognize talent. Think about what could happen if you actually do something about this even if your supervisor isn't asking you to do so. It can be as simple as acknowledging something that an employee does; for example, "Jennifer, it was great how you stepped up when we were putting together the prospect presentation package." You can assign different work when the employee demonstrates unexpected initiative. Or you can ask another employee to mentor an employee who demonstrates potential. Be proactive about identifying initiative and observing how consistently you see this from these employees.



► **Principle #4. Open their eyes to what's possible.**

Simply put, many women never think about reaching the leadership direction. They don't know it's available to them. They don't recognize their own talents. They don't think it's possible. They don't think they're eligible. You can make a meaningful difference by shifting their awareness of what is possible. Even though these actions may not result immediately in promotions, you'll find that people walk a little taller and more confidently if they've been singled out as someone with potential.

► **Principle #5. Be a role model and work on yourself.**

What are you doing to advance yourself? If you're contributing to women's leadership by showing what's possible, take it a giant step further by enhancing your own leadership potential. After all, if it takes one to know one, let's start at the source (you) and seek out development opportunities for yourself as well. Perhaps you can take a class, such as goal setting, delivering feedback in difficult situations or developing financial acumen. By investing in learning, you'll not only become a better manager, but you'll also encourage the women on your team to develop their skills as well.

None of this is rocket science, but each of these principles starts with recognizing something that may be different than what is being practiced or perceived

in your organization, then taking the time to break through old images and stereotypes. Change can happen when you take the first step to lead the way.

Everyone *can* be a leader, and your ability to spark interest and initiative in the women who work for you will create results you never even considered. My prediction is that your team will get stronger, your women will feel more empowered, and there may even be a promotion around the corner for you sooner than you expected.



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