

Women in Leadership



**Making a
Difference for
Women
Leaders
in Guernsey**

Spring 2009

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Foreword

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I began my career in the UK in the early 80s, moving back to Guernsey in 1986 to join the finance industry. I spent over 20 years in the industry with 10 years as Director, COO at Credit Suisse Fund Administration, before deciding to pursue a career as an Executive Coach.

Looking around our island I began to wonder how much real progress women had made in reaching top positions in the 20 years I had spent in the finance industry? Is there a glass ceiling in Guernsey and if so what is keeping it in place? Most importantly for Guernsey, are we failing to optimise the talent we have within our female work force? Could more senior roles be filled by locally based women without resorting to bringing in additional licence holders?

I conducted this study during the autumn of 2008 and was completing the interview process just as the global economic crisis started to unfold. I decided to refrain from releasing the survey results at that time as my audience had other priorities. We are now in a new world which is demanding a change in our approach to leadership, including a better balance of leadership behaviours at the top. Women's innate strengths can help to provide this balance and this report reveals what women need to do to enhance their chances of securing top team positions.

The original aim of the study was to examine the questions: -

- What are the barriers, real or perceived, to women in Guernsey achieving senior management roles?
- What can I do as an Executive Coach to help women who want to reach the top get the positions they desire?

I now add the question: -

- How can we optimise the talent based locally to best lead business in the challenging economic climate so that Guernsey remains a strong player in the new economy?

I hope you find this an interesting and thought provoking read.

Michelle Johansen
Spring 2009

About **Johansen Executive Coaching**

Established in 1997 by Cato Johansen MBA, Master Certified Coach, today the Company has Clients in the UK, Scandinavia, Europe, Dubai, USA and the Channel Islands. As well as Cato and Michelle Johansen, directors and executive coaches based in Guernsey, Johansen Executive Coaching draws upon a network of highly qualified associate coaches and workshop leaders from across Europe.

Focusing on leading change, the Company provides Executive Coaching, Team Coaching and facilitation of large group change processes. All of our coaches have individually been through a process of personal re-invention, coming from senior management or management consulting into coaching leaders and teams.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a study conducted by Johansen Executive Coaching into Women in Leadership, gathered from interviews with 40 senior professional men and women in Guernsey. It explores the real and perceived barriers to gender equality in Guernsey, examines the behaviours and attitudes of women, as well as looking at the role coaching can play in helping more women to become senior executives.

The Gender Issue

The number of women at board level in the UK is declining and Guernsey has made slow progress in this area, despite on-island labour shortages. Evidence from the US and Europe appears to show senior teams with a minimum of 30% female membership have improved business performance, largely due to the different innate strengths that women bring to the table. Women's continuing role as the primary carers within the family is a major factor in reducing the number of women available for senior roles, but this is the easy explanation; other factors need to be considered to establish how we can optimally utilise the available female talent pool on-island.

The Guernsey Factor

This survey attributes the under representation of women at top team in Guernsey to: - the late adoption of employment legislation, limitations imposed by part-time hours, the island attracting families on licence with women in the secondary careers, perceived discrimination against locals in favour of broader experienced licence holders, senior women downsizing early, traditional male dominated cultures and the behaviours and attitudes of the women themselves. As Guernsey squares up to face the challenging economic climate including the focus of the world's media on tax practices, can we draw on innate female leadership strengths to help us through this unprecedented period of change? Or will the additional pressure on the system further reduce the female presence in the Guernsey board room?

Behaviours & Attitudes

Society, culture and the economy have a large role to play in the gender issue. However it is possible for women to improve their prospects of securing a top team position by analysing their own behaviours and attitudes and taking responsibility for how they are consciously or unconsciously supporting or undermining their progress.

Women who succeed generally have attitudes and behaviours that are supportive to their interactions with both men and women, in contrast to those who perceive men to be the enemy and attempt to fight their way to the top. Mentors, role models and networking were all considered important factors for success, with a call for more official mentoring schemes and networking opportunities. Successful women have navigated through the corporate waters by learning from their mistakes. **This study is designed to capture that learning and create a coaching programme to pass this knowledge on to those in their career ascendancy and thereby increase their chance of selection for top team.**

The Role of Coaching

Executive coaching is designed to inspire and support the personal development of both men and women to maximise their potential. Although each individual will face their own unique challenges, this study suggests focus areas where women can make personal changes and transformation to improve their chances of securing senior executive positions: - **confidence building, exploring unconscious behaviour patterns and limiting beliefs associated with gender, increasing the ability to give and receive feedback, refining communications skills, creating "appropriate" presence & impact and handling stress.**

As well as maybe the biggest single factor identified, supporting women to overcome their natural reticence to self promotion and putting themselves forward as available for senior positions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank wholeheartedly everyone who generously gave their time to participate in this study, and again reassuring them of their anonymity!

To get to the juice of this subject I wanted to hear senior leaders' opinions, perceptions and biases. In fact the exact opposite of our modern day, politically correct society's approach to dealing with sensitive gender issues. I acknowledge that for every sweeping generalisation there will be exceptions. I nevertheless needed to extract the generalisations from the interviewees to identify what is actually influencing the Guernsey demographic at senior levels.

I would like to thank the women who contributed to this study for their openness and the generosity with which they gave both their time and opinions. I would also really like to thank the senior male contributors, especially those who had to overcome their obvious discomfort to speak candidly about this subject.

Methodology

I first considered then dismissed a written survey approach on the basis that statistics probably wouldn't help much, plus I thought the likelihood of the people I actually wanted to target committing to print their real thoughts and opinions was highly unlikely. For this reason I decided to conduct a series of open interviews aiming to speak to some of the top male and female executives in Guernsey.

To solicit genuine opinions and to keep my influence on their contributions to a minimum, I decided to conduct the interviews by recording what they each wished to say on the subject rather than asking too many questions. At my first interview with a senior female executive, I asked for referrals to others who she thought might be willing to help with this study. This commenced a chain resulting in an eventual interview sample of: -

Financial Services Companies and Legal Firms

- **14 men**
Job titles including CEO, Managing Director, Partner and Non-Exec Director
- **26 women**
Job titles including, Managing Director, Partner, Non-Exec Director, Director, Senior Manager, Manager and Assistant Manager

I did however make it known that, as a Coach, I was particularly interested in their views on the behaviours and attitudes which women might be adopting that assist their progress through the ranks and the behaviours and attitudes they observe hold women back.

To analyse the interview data, I amalgamated the comments and opinions from each interview into broad statements groupings and then into the headings that make up this report.

But whilst my particular interest may have been in behaviours and attitudes I couldn't ignore the other contributing factors that make up both the "gender" issue in the UK and Europe as well as the Guernsey factor.

The Gender Issue

The Concrete Ceiling

Before the world news was overtaken by the global economic crisis, reports were circulating in the national press based on the 5th Annual Sex and Power 2008* report published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission “EHRC”, showing that the actual numbers of women in senior positions in the UK is declining. In their words, after decades of progress women seemed to have hit not the glass ceiling but one made of “reinforced concrete”.

The EHRC, using admittedly sensationalist language, cited the fact that there are more female politicians in Iraq and Afghanistan than Britain and at the current rate of progress it will take 200 years to achieve parity. The affect the recession will have on the gender equation is still unfolding, although early reports (The Times 25th January 2009) note mounting alarm over recent figures suggesting twice as many women are being made redundant as men in some parts of the country. How will this affect Guernsey, especially at senior level? Will the trend towards returning to a more traditional family structure continue as the job market is squeezed or will the different strengths and talents that women bring to top team be in even more demand as Companies need to reshape to meet the future?

UK Survey Findings

A survey* of 600 professional men and women conducted by a top, London based, female focussed coaching company in 2007 came to the following conclusions: -

- **Making a difference** – was the primary motivating success factor for 75% of men and women alike
- 20% more women than men were motivated by **flexibility** but this was not in their top four motivating factors
- The most admired leadership qualities for both men and women were **honesty, integrity and having a clear vision**
- The majority of leadership characteristics were considered gender neutral but a significant number of both men and women considered women to have higher skills in the areas of “**awareness of behaviour and impact**” and “**emotional intelligence**”.
- 50% more men than women aspired to taking top positions in the future, whilst double the number of women than men aspired to **be their own boss**.
- **Work/life balance** is an issue for both genders, with many men dissatisfied with the amount of contact time they have with their children.
- The survey also showed an interesting phenomenon whereby women see themselves as generally **lacking confidence** although the men surveyed did not see women in the same way.
- Both genders said that **the system needs to change** to bring about equality at top team and that **women must be part of leading this change**.

* see bibliography

The Bottom Line

Various studies* including the Catalyst* survey are frequently quoted in literature purporting to show that having at least 30% female board members improves bottom line profitability. At face value this may seem a little simplistic since there are so many variables which contribute to bottom line success. However, what I believe these surveys do show is that, in general, companies perform better when the board has a balance of personal strengths, and women are naturally predisposed to offer different strengths to their male colleagues.

Indeed, is the current global economic crisis a direct result of this imbalance? How would events have unfolded differently had more women been in the boardrooms?

CIPD Research

Research published by the CIPD in February 2009* based on interviews with senior business leaders across Europe, presented findings showing a number of barriers to the progression of women to senior executive positions which include: -

- Perceptions about women's management style
- Difficulties with masculine organisational cultures
- General discrimination
- Barriers to gaining the right experience
- Difficulties with managing family commitments
- Women lacking confidence in their own abilities

This study concluded that **coaching could play a valuable role in helping women to build their confidence, improve networking and making the right impression**, as well as less gender specific areas including: -

- Providing a sounding board for ideas
- Dealing with organisational culture
- Identifying values and goals
- Assisting the transition from one role to the next
- Developing leadership skills

European Approaches

With our strong Norwegian connections it is worth just mentioning the Norwegian approach to this subject. In 2002 shock legislation was introduced to force all boards to have 40% female membership by 2006, an increase of 34% from the 2002 figures. This legislation was strongly resisted by women who argued that they wanted promotion only on their own merits not because of quotas. Whilst implementation has been uncomfortable for all concerned the Sunday Times* reported in 2008 that "the sky hasn't fallen in as predicted". Spain has now followed suit with a 40% quota system, whilst David Cameron has talked about a quota system for female politicians, which has been greeted by a similar outcry to the Norwegian decision. So are quotas the answer? Generally women don't think so, but 7 years on the Norwegian system is working well with women an accepted presence in the board room.

The Guernsey Factor

Guernsey in comparison to the UK

Many interviewees with experience of working in the UK and overseas recounted stories of being shocked on moving to the island, to experience how far behind trend Guernsey was with the integration of women into senior leadership positions. This was largely laid at the door of Guernsey's **late adoption of employment legislation**. To compare with the UK then presents some difficulties since the current crop of senior women in Guernsey in their 40's and 50's are "first generation" female leaders compared to their "second generation" cousins in the UK and Europe.

In general, organisations with an established tradition of adopting their onshore parent company's HR policies appeared to have both more women at senior level and more flexibility towards their working part-time.

Home, Children and Working Hours

It varied enormously from interview to interview how much people wished to talk about these issues. Much has been written on this subject previously so I will confine my comments to those I believe to be the most pertinent insights from this study: -

- There would appear to be **as many pressures on working mothers now as 20 years ago**. It may now be more generally accepted that women within traditional family structures go out to work, but our "green" society and constant media diet of "best parenting practices" has increased pressure to use eco-nappies, home-made organic baby food, spend quality bonding time with the children and get involved with after-school activities. Women would appear faced with the choice of working part-time hours and suffer the inevitable consequences within the current system on promotional prospects or delegate at least some of the child rearing to "nannies and grannies".
- For these reasons there remains **high peer and family pressure for mothers to work part-time** rather than full-time. One expectant Mum interviewed stated that she both hated the inconvenience of part-timers in the work place and fully intended to be one.
- Gaining **international experience and promotion before having children** were both seen as factors in helping women to succeed later in their career. Employers appear to be more willing to adapt to requests for part-time hours for senior positions for women who have already proved their worth at that level, than to assist women at lower levels to progress through the ranks while working part-time.
- **Guernsey society is arguably both more old fashioned and transparent than the UK**. Husbands may still be embarrassed if friends and colleagues know their wives are the major bread winners. In the UK, work colleagues are less likely to know the spouse so maybe it is transparency factor which is the real issue here?
- Guernsey is a fabulous place to bring up young children. Our incomes and standards of living are high, so do mothers really want to be in an office all day when they could **spend summer afternoons down the beach with the children?**
- Senior jobs today often have a **24/7 culture**, with short notice meetings, travel, blackberries and late nights the norm. Women make compromises by trading regular hours for sub-potential positions.

Housing Licences

The number of senior people on licence would also appear to sway the statistics in favour of there being more men at top team. The island's good education system makes it a great family destination, attracting those with children where more often it is the **wife with the secondary career**. Professionals without children tend to head to more exotic offshore locations.

The Glass Cliff

I decided to give up my directorial role in the Finance Industry due to stress and a desire to create a better work life balance as I approached my 50s. Our children have left home; now my husband and I can travel on business together instead of leading almost separate lives. I suppose that I shouldn't have been surprised to find a number of interviewees in their 40s/50s following a similar downsizing route, at a time regarded for men to be the peak career years.

So is the "glass cliff" phenomenon more prevalent in Guernsey? Is the island's work force losing a disproportionate number of high potential women as they cut short their careers in favour of **stress reduction and an improved work/life balance**? In terms of Guernsey's work force development plan, perhaps helping senior women to address stress issues and keep them within the workforce is as much of a pressing issue as helping women to return to work after raising their families?

The Local Factor

One unexpected result of this study was the men and women who recounted stories of having experienced **discrimination against them for being local**. Generally it was felt that having a local name and accent were a big disadvantage, since some non-islanders viewed locals as ill educated, narrow minded and work shy.

Attitudes may have changed as the island workforce has significantly increased its qualification base over the last 10 years due in no small part to the efforts of the GTA University Centre. Indeed, some of the licence holders interviewed clearly saw the local residents as the ones with the advantage. So perhaps this factor depends more on which side on the fence you are sitting.

However, this topic opened up conversations about having the "right" background and education, and how this may influence the progression of women in leadership in Guernsey. The affect of attending the "right" social events and mixing in the "right" social circles. How acceptable is it for professional women to bring their tradesmen husbands to social functions as opposed to professional men bringing along their stay-at-home wives? From my own observations and those of the interviewees I would venture that this is indeed a factor within some of the more traditional organisations in Guernsey.

The size of organisation notwithstanding, if local women wish to get to the top of their professions then having both the **requisite professional qualifications and off island experience** would appear essential. It would also seem to be the case that those who forge ahead and get the promotions early before having their families, fare better when it comes to securing a top job and flexible hours. At the same time it is much more difficult for those who try to get promoted while working part-time at a lower grade.

Behaviours and Attitudes

Taken together the above factors inevitably mean there will be fewer women than men vying for the top positions, but what about the behaviours and attitudes of women in the system? What role are they playing in helping or hindering women from reaching the top?

Equal and Different

Virtually all interviewees see women as having **different strengths** than men. Concurring with the UK study, **emotional intelligence, intuition, communication and relational skills** were cited most often.

A number of senior women also said that they enjoyed the privilege of being the only women at their grade, seeing this as a unique identifier which gave them an advantage. In contrast they observe that women, who treat men as the enemy, invariably create problems for themselves by adding unnecessary tension.

Contrary to the beliefs of some of the younger women currently working their way through the ranks, the **senior men interviewed wholeheartedly welcome the inclusion of women at top team**. They recognise the greater balance brought to top team by the inclusion of women and their different strengths. However, all acknowledged that the current system and cultural influences would have to change significantly before women could hope to compete with men on an entirely level playing field.

Role Models

Having **suitable role models** during the early part of a woman's career was a point mentioned time and again. Many senior women cited male role models as their main influencers due to a lack of female role models in the system at the time, whereas the younger women were able to point to more female role models who are currently influencing their leadership styles.

The vast majority agreed that women in leadership roles need to **retain their femininity and female strengths**. Both men and women alike spoke of finding the women who adopt the harder male characteristics as alienating. Although there was evidence that pseudo-masculine women may reach management positions, it would appear to be much rarer for them to reach top team.

Mentors

Again most of the senior women spoke of their **gratitude towards their mentors**, emphasising how important this role had been for them. Most said that the mentoring had not been an official arrangement but just something which had happened. It was observed that men appear to benefit from unofficial mentoring more frequently than women. The imbalance in the numbers means that more mentors must necessarily be men. It is entirely acceptable for men to go the pub or play golf after work with a younger male colleague, but senior men will steer well clear of being seen with a younger female work colleague out side of work for very understandably reasons.

To further complicate this issue, the senior women who are in the system are also likely to avoid taking younger colleagues under their wing, as they are already over stretched trying to balance the demands of the job with children, husbands and household duties.

Therefore there would appear to be a need for more **official mentoring schemes** to be put in place to create the necessary safety so young women can benefit from the undeniable advantage of having a mentor.

Working Hard / Attention to Detail

Many interviewees noted the female trait of **working very hard**; also mentioned were traits of being **conscientious, meticulous and detail orientated**. In general women are often seen as priding themselves on the level of knowledge they have within their areas of responsibility, and more than one person talked of a need to feel in control. Undeniably these characteristics have helped women in the Guernsey system get to where they are today, but many of the senior women also pointed to having to work smarter not harder.

Working hard is an admirable quality, but the perceived downside of this gender trait is that being highly organised and detail orientated lends itself to managerial roles rather than top team. To work at top team requires a different skill set, meaning that those **women who struggle to let go of the detail get stuck in the managerial domain**. Indeed the younger women interviewed who pointed to positive female role models in the Guernsey system, highlighted their admiration for just such traits which may be perpetuating this phenomenon.

Having to be better than Men

The female propensity to work hard can be exacerbated further by what many perceive as **the myth that women have to be better than male colleagues** to get on. It was agreed that women need to have the requisite experience and qualifications but their pursuit of promotion can come undone when they adopt an “I’ll show them I’m better than a man” attitude.

Behavioural science shows that people who believe they are in the under dog position, whether male or female, will perceive either they cannot win and become victims or feel they must fight their way to the top. If they choose the fight option, generally this will be accompanied by unconscious behaviour that includes non-verbal signals of aggression and competitiveness, which can create tension and an unpleasant atmosphere. If they believe they cannot win, unconscious behaviours will negate their presence and help them either to disappear into the background or adopt blaming behaviour. As only 7% of communication is carried in the actual words spoken, this is an area where women can unwittingly create problems for themselves through tone, expression and body language.

Women exhibiting such behaviours were described by both men and women as being “prickly, hyper-sensitive, hard-work, argumentative and self-righteous” creating unnecessary tension and an unpleasant atmosphere in the work place.

In contrast some of the senior women interviewed talked of never having really considered gender as an issue, forgetting that there were supposed to be barriers to women in the work place. Consequently these unconscious behaviour drivers described above had not been in play during their promotional years. By **behaving as an equal and seeing themselves on a par with their male colleagues**, both sides were able to park the gender issue allowing for a more relaxed atmosphere and better working relationships.

Values and Integrity

A particularly sensitive issue raised by interviewees of both genders, was the perception that women are more likely to stand up for what they believe in and not compromise their principles. It was perceived that men faced with a difficult choice, may be more likely to suppress their own values in favour of carrying through company policies. Men are regarded as being more interested in preserving the financial safety of

their families, whilst women were perceived as being motivated by trying to protect the organisation as if it were an extension of their families.

Various examples of **women sacrificing themselves and their careers to protect what they believed to be in the best interests of their organisations** were recounted. Women fighting for their cause being compared by one interviewee to a “terrier with a rubber ring”.

Some of the interviewees took the view that whilst having high ideals and maintaining integrity are admirable qualities, women also need to be able to step back from the content of the discussion far enough to enable them to get a balanced picture of the wider political ramifications, as well as utilise their communication skills in a way that opens up dialogue rather than creating win/lose conflict.

Generally men are regarded as better at playing the political game within organisations, and thus more likely to prepare the ground with board colleagues before bringing up sensitive issues within a meeting forum.

Communication Skills

Generally **women are perceived as being excellent communicators** and able to use these skills in a positive manner to build relationships with colleagues, staff, bosses and customers. According to Allan Pease* women use an average of 20,000 communication gestures a day compared to the male 7,000. Women’s ability to perceive nuances in conversation and detect the hidden meaning behind words can lead to a greater depth of understanding and rapport.

Women therefore have a natural advantage over men in the communication arena, however due to this communication dexterity, women are also perceived as more likely than men to fall into verbal traps. One trap being, reading perceived meaning into statements that were not intended by the speaker and using their tone of voice to carry messages rather than direct speech. Men generally prefer direct communication and miss the nuances when women speak indirectly. Men can be sensitive to feeling blamed when women use a vocal tone which indicates disapproval or indignation even if the words spoken mean the opposite. Feeling blamed sets men on the defensive which will generally see them become more forthright and blunt.

The senior women who thrive at top team have **learned to bridge the cross gender communication gap**, often without making a conscious effort to do so. For those women who wish to make it to top team, having the skills to communicate effectively with male colleagues and bosses is a must.

Feedback & Sensitivity

Women are generally perceived to be **more sensitive to feedback and criticism** than their male colleagues and are more likely to take negative feedback personally, which can lead to tears, upset, lost confidence, defensiveness and hyper-sensitivity. The positive side of this equation is that women are seen as more likely to take the feedback on board and make the necessary changes.

This can lead to male superiors avoiding giving feedback to women, in fear of an emotional scene. The consequence is that **women can miss out on valuable constructive criticism** which if taken on board could transform their promotional prospects.

Studies conducted in the US* claim that this situation has been exacerbated by men not wishing to give feedback to women in case they claim it to be sexual discrimination.

Women are most able to take constructive criticism if it is handled in such a way that makes it clear that they are valued and respected as a person and for their contribution, but they would be more effective if

they made a behaviour change. A coaching approach is to help the individual to distinguish between their sense of identity and the behaviour that is being criticised, and in that way, they are able to grow a thicker skin.

My observations lead me to believe there is a **general training need within Guernsey to improve feedback skills** within organisations. Our history of full-employment has exacerbated this issue as line managers have tip-toed around issues to avoid losing otherwise valuable staff members. The consequence being that managers often lack this skill set and staff are not accustomed to hearing constructive criticism on how they could make improvements to their work style.

Networking

During my career I have lost count of the times I have heard women complain about male bosses, who take long lunch hours socialising and attending functions instead of working hard through the lunch hour like they do!

There is a tendency for women to value networking within their organisations and with clients, but to consider cross company and professional body networking as a “nice to do” but not essential in the face of doing real work in their organisations. Also women are often working within tighter time frames than men to accommodate family commitments.

Consequently **women tend to have a much weaker professional network than men**, not benefiting from having their ear to the ground on events in their industry or being as well placed to find their next career move.

A big implication of this general failure to network was highlighted by one interviewee, a London based head hunter operating in the local market. She pointed out how women in Guernsey are **cutting themselves off from the reaches of the head hunters**, as when searches are made their names are not on the lips of those making the recommendations.

Helping other Women

A less expected finding of this study was the number of interviewees who noted how women do not naturally help other women to succeed in the workplace. Indeed some of the greatest animosity observed being between competing female colleagues. Perhaps this phenomenon has a deep anthropological basis, but whatever the driver, the fact is men help other men. So if women want to have a greater representation on top team they **need to increase the help and support they offer to each other**.

It is notable that organisations such as Women in Professions and Women at One are making positive steps in creating female networks to help and support other women, also the CIPD have a very effective largely female network for HR professionals. However, there would still appear to be a need for more women to wake up to the benefits of networking and helping other women once they are involved in these networks.

Confidence

Many of the senior women interviewed have natural self-confidence and have thus flourished in the organisational system, others talked about having had to work hard to overcome lack of confidence, especially around public speaking.

Some interviewees expressed their frustration with talented women in their organisations who hold themselves back, indicating concurrence with the London study where women raised lack of confidence as a female issue. This is emphasised by a study carried out by the Equal Opportunities Committee which

concluded that men need to be only 30% certain they can do a job before applying whereas women need to feel 70 - 80% certain.

One consequence for organisations is that self-selection management development programmes will attract fewer women as they **will hold back from applying thinking they are not yet ready**. Whereas if organisations select candidates for management development from the talent pool they are more likely to have higher female representation.

Maybe it is upbringing, gender conditioning or lack of confidence but women have a tendency to wait to be noticed rather than self-promote like their male colleagues. To compete on a par with men, **women need to overcome their natural reticence to self-promotion**.

Coaching can help women who need to increase their confidence and overcome natural reticence to putting themselves forward thus helping both the individual and the organisation maximise the talent potential.

Presence & Impact

Being “appropriately noticed” is the key to presence and impact, achieving balance and the skills to adjust the volume to the circumstances. Confidence, body language, demeanour, communication style all come under this heading, as does the more thorny issue of dress.

Without a doubt, when it comes to dress women have much more scope for getting it “wrong” than their suited male colleagues, thus not surprisingly this subject was raised by many more female interviewees than men with differing opinions about what constitutes “right”!

We all project on to others qualities that they may or may not possess based upon appearance. One interviewee spoke at length about her decision not to conform to the grey/black suited norm of the legal profession in London, choosing instead colourful jackets and statement necklaces. When asked how she felt about her choice in retrospect she emphatically stated that she had damaged her career prospects by not conforming to expectations!

Successful women generally find their way through this issue and act as role models for others. However women on their ascendancy can unwittingly strangle their careers by being inappropriately noticed for dressing for fashion, dressing too young, over accessorising, showing too much flesh and wearing too much perfume and make up.

We would all no doubt support the ethos that ability alone should be the deciding factor, but the best piece of advice that I have come across for women of any age who wish to advance their careers is **“dress for the job that you want, not the one you have got”***.

Conclusion

What are the barriers, real or perceived, to women in Guernsey achieving senior management roles?

Unsurprisingly this study concurs with the view that the system is weighted against there being an equal number of men and women at top team, since the available female talent pool is reduced by those excluded by family commitments and personal choice. Society as well as our organisations will have to undergo significant changes before these factors are ever likely to be completely turned around.

For those within the available talent pool, there would appear to be both real and perceived barriers to advancement. At least in part, contributed to by the attitudes and behaviours displayed by women, as well as the projections of the men and women already in the system. If women are willing to accept that they may have a role in contributing to their fate then I believe they can benefit greatly from taking these findings on board.

What can I do as an Executive Coach to help women who want to reach the top get the positions they desire?

The first rule of coaching is that people must be open to accept that their current situation is at least in part due to their own creation and have a willingness to change. Some changes such as increasing networking activity and attention to dress do not necessarily require coaching, although working on having the confidence to work a room may do.

The areas I believe coaching can make the greatest difference in supporting women to get to top team are: -

- **confidence building**
- **creating appropriate presence & impact**
- **working smarter not harder to step up to senior leadership**
- **increasing the ability to give and receive feedback**
- **refining communications skills**
- **exploring unconscious behaviour patterns and limiting beliefs associated with gender**
- **supporting women to handle stress and find a better work/life balance**

Many of the women interviewed said they would support female only, development initiatives within their organisations while the majority of the men felt that this would be gender discrimination and set a dangerous precedent. If we look at the Norwegian model where quotas have been introduced, organisations have needed to talent spot women and single them out for development to increase the pool available for top team selection. **As many talented and able women hold themselves back within the Guernsey system, it is a fair assumption that organisations may need to do more to encourage women to make themselves available for promotion than equally talented men.**

For every gender stereotype about women there is equally one about men. Although all the men that I met during this interview process were delightful, I did hear stories of male arrogance, dominating behaviours, lack of empathy, low emotional intelligence etc, to the extent that it is clear that any gender coaching initiative would be equally applicable for men as women.

So perhaps the ultimate finding of this study is that both men and women can benefit from coaching support to: -

- increase self-awareness
- separate good intentions from unintended negative impact
- hone business relationship skills
- find and develop inner self-confidence
- develop communication skills which support active listening and dialogue
- provide a sounding board for ideas
- identify values and goals
- assist the transition from one role to the next
- develop leadership skills

With more such leaders whatever their gender then positivity and performance in the Guernsey work force would be increased, leading to reduced staff turnover and increased profitability.

How can we optimise the talent based locally to best lead business in the challenging economic climate so that Guernsey remains a strong player in the new economy?

The global credit situation has brought the uncertainty of the world into sharp focus. How will Guernsey's finance industry weather the crisis? What will be the effect of the spotlight on tax optimisation structures by the G20? How protected is our economy or are we living in denial of the wider implications of this crisis for our island? The answers to these questions are as yet unknown and will take time to emerge, but what is clear is that our politicians and business leaders are facing the toughest challenges of their careers as they lead us through these turbulent times.

Research published recently by the CIPD* indicates that **during the recession leaders will be required to demonstrate high emotional intelligence skills, to understand and address the psychological needs of their organisations, which is seen as a female strength.**

Budgets for leadership development are being squeezed as the same time as the needs for optimal leadership performance is heightened. **Executive Coaching** support is increasingly being utilised to combine both **leadership development** with the provision of confidential discussion partners, thus coaches with proven business track records are being utilised to fulfil **business mentoring and organisational consultancy** roles.

Development initiatives are also tending to shift towards **optimising team performance**. A spokesperson from KPMG is quoted in a CIPD publication* as saying "In up times teams can be successful in spite of inter-competition and silos. Now top teams need to be more aligned than ever."

Johansen Executive Coaching are currently working with leadership teams to create greater team functioning and thereby help business leaders steer their way through the economic crisis by:

- Developing strategies that align current action with the organisations' purpose
- Creating clarity around what is needed and energising people to make it happen
- Transforming their relationships and team dynamics

The difference, and the ultimate test for organisations during these times, will be how leaders, whatever their gender, respond to the economic climate.

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