

Highlights of the Research on Calgary's Leading Women

Background

Over a period of about 6 weeks from March to May 2006, interviews were conducted with 31 of Calgary's top talent, representing 15 companies. While most of the women interviewed are employed in the oil and gas industry (n=22), four are employed in the finance industry, 3 in the energy/power industry, one in manufacturing and one in commercial real estate.

Who the Women Are

- ▣ 64.5% are at the VP level; 19.3% at Management level & 16.1% at Exec level
- ▣ 51.6% are Officers of the company
- ▣ Calgary's leaders are highly educated – all had post secondary education.
- ▣ Of those with degrees, 37.5% have a science degree; 46.8% have a social science degree & 15.6% have a business degree
- ▣ Almost half, 45% have an advanced degree such as MBA, Master of Science, and Master of Law
- ▣ A large majority of the leading women are married (83%) and have children (87%) and, in addition to balancing work and family life, 74% participate on a work related board or committee. Of these, only 2 women are on a paying board.

What they Do

Two of the core competencies used in work most frequently by leading women was (#1) Understanding the business and (#2) Communication which was tied with Interpersonal Relationships. Almost half of the women worked in some kind of operational capacity (42%)

How Leaders developed their Leadership Styles

The participants identified that their business skills were acquired primarily through on the job training, which included managing a turn around; highly technical skill development plus project management, or exposure to new work or projects; moving to different parts of the organization; or having an opportunity to build from the ground up.

Key work experiences were also important in their leadership development, including stretch assignments such as working outside her technical expertise & scope; stepping outside comfort zone; leading a project that was a success; or work with a team outside her scope. Key experiences outside work included volunteer work providing a rich foundation for leadership development. Involvement in sports was also a factor in experiences that facilitated leadership growth.

Getting Work Done

The majority of the women, both in and outside the oil patch, identified that building a strong network of business relationships was critical to getting work done (53%) in the oil and gas industry.

Challenges to Leading Today

Most of the leaders identified managing people issues as a priority – either finding or keeping the right individuals and keeping employee motivation high. Managing personal limitations was the second highest challenge including issues such as time management, maintaining confidence; learning new roles; being an introvert; feeling isolated; or public speaking.

An important challenge for these leaders was identified when the women were asked to define the work styles inside the organization that were valued. Women referenced a strong work ethic 29% of the time, which has significant implications for women who are already balancing work roles with a large scope, raising a family and contributing to work related committees.

Contributors to Leadership Success

Project success was identified as the most common factor (34%) mentioned by the women interviewed as contributing to their success. However a second factor almost as significant is Relationships (30%). The first factor is directly related to key experience on the job and the resulting success of the project was increased visibility in the organization as well as confidence and credibility. Relationships included significant positive relationships such as having a boss who believed in her, a mentor or positive role model.

Being able to manage stress and find balance was seen as very important to leadership success. What these leading women have done to facilitate

their success is to develop a work style that incorporates a balance with their other demands. Specifically, this includes variations of bringing work home or not bringing work home to complete; setting boundaries on work hours, time commitments, when to work at home, (no evenings, no weekends, leave work on time, having dinner with family, scheduling an end to the day, select events to attend outside of work hours, work at home when kids asleep); no compromises; task lists; making family a priority; work through lunch; travel efficiently; and finally ensuring there is appropriate domestic help.

For more information on the results of this research or the model of leadership for women developed by Leibham and Company, contact Donna Leibham at leibham.and.company@shaw.ca