

High Powered But Not Up To Speed

By Shawna Schuh, CSP



I spoke to an executive women's group that included bankers, lawyers, stockbrokers and business leaders. The energy level was high and my topic was well received. I was presenting an overview of a seminar I was offering instructing executives how they could enhance their company's bottom line by using gracious behavior and I thought that these women would be interested in attending.

While I waited to begin my presentation I observed these very high-powered women who were proud of their status, had passion for their purpose, and had formed the association to build a network for each other. I was glad to be in their company.

As I continued to observe them, I witnessed the usual behaviors that continue to re-enforce my belief that we could all use a refresher course in good manners, particularly while conducting business. The president of the association was upset with a matter involving the lunch and confronted one of the wait staff. This woman was clearly in charge and wanted immediate action, and although it was not the young man's fault, she was disrespectful. She had an opportunity to be gracious and didn't use it.

I noticed women speaking to each other while someone at their table was making an announcement, drawing attention away from the presenter, and I noticed far too many women who did not wait until

everyone at their table was served before beginning their meal. Lastly, there were also several women who didn't bother to introduce themselves to those around them. I couldn't figure out why such professional women were so off their mark when it came to being gracious. Could the reason I saw so many examples of less than stellar behavior simply be that these women didn't realize what they didn't know? Or were they, like so many of us, caught up in the doing of life rather than the being in life?

When our entire focus and hard work is directed toward one goal we sometimes let other things slide, graciousness included. Outwardly, these women appeared to have it all; power suits, manicured hands, all the right accessories. During my speech they were attentive and interested, asking great questions and even giving me some leads! But when I offered the opportunity for them to improve themselves by attending my workshop, almost everyone, including those I noted as most in need of it, declined or sent their assistant!

For some reason, these executive women didn't think, or didn't want to admit, that they might need a little improvement. Of course we all have different reasons for doing, or not doing things. For some it could have been the wrong day or time or priority, but if we think we already know everything, we can't be exceptional leaders, male or female.

I've been blessed to recently work with a team of men who are interested in learning everything that will help them gain influence. They may be excelling in business but if their manners are not up to par it can be a

pretty miserable ride for the people they work with and uncomfortable for themselves as well.

These men seem to know and understand what the group of executive women hadn't caught on to yet; that subtle things can be the most powerful as you move up in your career.

If women intend to do all they can in their organizations they must also learn to be as well mannered and polished as possible. Not because it's something a woman

should do, but because it makes good business sense.

In Jim Collins fantastic book, "*Good to Great*," he speaks about Level Five Leaders. One thing that sets them apart from other less effective leaders is their humility and concern for courtesy and the welfare of others. This while not taking away their intense drive or focus on results.

Without graciousness we may get obedience but we will never get loyalty. We may be feared but we won't be favored. We may get ahead but we might not find many people to celebrate with. By learning how to be more gracious to those around us, we will not only be the type of person people want to be around, we will also be the type of person people want to do business with.

The next time you are at a women's business event observe the behaviors around you. Do this for two reasons; to note those whom you want to know better based on their behavior, and how bad behavior looks in practice.

If the women I observed had any idea how they came across I know they would have taken my class. I hope they read this article because one thing is for certain; we can all improve.

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